COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. 865.

THE RACE FOR WEALTH

BY

F. G. TRAFFORD (MRS. J. H. RIDDELL).

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1866.

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VOL. II

IN TWO VOLUMES

BY

G. TREVELYAN (Miss L. H. RUDDOCK)

AND

THE BAGE FOR MEDICAL

VOL. 882

BRITISH AUTHORS'

OF

COLLECTION

THE

RACE FOR WEALTH.

A NOVEL.

BY

F. G. TRAFFORD (MRS. J. H. RIDDELL),

AUTHOR OF "GEORGE GEITH."

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THE RACE FOR WEALTH.

CHAPTER I.

Rejected.

THE morning after a large party does not usually seem especially cheerful to those who have been making merry over-night.

Mr. Thomas Moore, in some luxuriously sentimental lines, has been obliging enough to state this fact before me; but his verses convey the idea of a melancholy which is at once romantic, dreamy, poetical, and not wholly displeasing, while the melancholy to which I am alluding is decidedly prosaic, matter-of-fact and totally unendurable.

Treading a deserted banquet-hall by the light of the moon or a solitary wax candle is one thing, and seeing an ordinary house about 6 o'clock A.M. in disorder quite another; traversing rooms after the guests have departed, and, in the loneliness, harmoniously rhyming out thoughts full of a delicious sadness, has not exactly the same effect as opening the shutters in the morning, and letting daylight in on the litter and confusion a parcel of people always leave behind them.

If the lady who presided over the evening's entertainment, or the housemaid who admits the sunshine into the room, were to write verses on such an

occasion, the poem produced would be rather dissimilar to that of which mention has already been made.

A general feeling of upside-downness is the effect produced in the morning by a merry-making over-night; the hostess is weary, the host has exhausted his energies; the servants are in a perfect "Inferno" of plates and tumblers, of dishes and wine-glasses; the rooms look as though a troop of cavalry had camped on the carpets and slept anyhow on the chairs; the gravel in front of the house is torn up by the pawing of horses, by the scraping of impatient hoofs; there are scores of empty bottles; the flowers so bright the previous day look flabby and faded; the guests are a little jaded, and no one really has time to fight the battle o'er again and enjoy the evening in retrospect, except a few young ladies who, rising at mid-day, repair to each other's dressing-rooms, where they mutually flatter — Blanche, Agatha, — and Agatha, Diana — and wish they were going to just such another party every night throughout the year.

There are many things in nature and art to which the "morning after" bears a singular likeness.

Two of these present themselves to me: one a muslin dress, with the starch out; the other, that strange plant, the acanthus.

Floating in clouds of drapery, Hebe proceeds to conquest; but suppose a shower of rain extract the stiffening from her gown — how does Hebe look then? The drapery floats no longer, but hangs limp, and the be-flowered and be-frilled trifle is sent off incontinently to the laundress.

Then as for the acanthus: what so darkly green, so

grandly stately in its luxuriant foliage, while in the heat? In all directions the leaves magnificently group themselves into position, and from the centre of the leaves, as from the centre of a graceful basket, spring the flowers, tall and erect.

It is a splendid plant seen thus in the drawing-room to-night; but put it out to-morrow morning in the spring breeze, and you shall see the green leaves become yellow, and fall down over the side of the pot as though dead; you shall have to search for the flowers, fallen also; after a time you will have to search also for the acanthus itself, for, behold! in place of beauty, ugliness; in lieu of graceful foliage, something that looks like a rotting vegetable — like turnips or carrots long out of the ground, dead, faded, unbeautiful!

Back from the laundress comes the dress, killing as ever. Lift your acanthus and bring it to the heat, and the sap rises again and fills the leaves, and causes the flowers to stand erect as formerly. Give the servants time, and they will clear all the *débris* out of the banquet-hall, and sweep it, and tidy it, and render it fit for the reception of more visitors. Allow the guests leisure to rest, and they will recall your party — if you have done your best in the matter — as an agreeable incident in their lives.

All of which brings me to what I wanted to say about Percy Forbes' experiment, which was so far successful, that although the next morning few people felt it had quite answered their expectations, yet for months afterwards many a person talked about that "night at Reach House" as a night they desired to pass over again.

The West-End matrons, when they reluctantly opened their eyes, decided "no way had been made" — that it was a long distance to Limehouse — that the mixture of classes was undesirable in the extreme; fathers felt that the affair would have been more jolly without the presence of their handsomely-dressed and magnificently-got-up better halves; young men were furious, as a rule, with jealousy, and deprecated free-and-easy parties with the intensest acrimony; while young ladies declared it had been "great fun," but were unable to conceal from themselves that social gatherings of such a description offered more scope for fun than for flirting.

As to the personages whom this story more immediately concerns, the evening's amusement certainly did not bear the morning's reflection.

For Ada and Mrs. Hills and Mrs. Jackson there were headaches unutterable; for Mrs. Perkins "that nasty sneer of Mr. Sondes," when he asked if he could take her to her "carriage," was a thorn in her flesh; for Percy Forbes there was the thought that he had cut himself off from a life of pleasure, and that such gatherings, which were to him once as the breath of life, could be enjoyed by him in the happy careless spirit of old no more; for Henrietta Alwyn there was the dreary hope that the man she loved, whom she had led so far on the road to matrimony, might turn at the eleventh hour and devote himself to Olivine Sondes; for Lawrence there was the conviction that Mr. Gainswoode was going to carry off Henrietta; whilst for Olivine there came a dim glimmering that outside the life she had known and loved there lay another life which she should yet have to live, grander

in its beauty, more terrible in its wretchedness, than any existence of which she had hitherto dreamed.

The aims and objects, the hopes and wishes, the joys and sorrows, of the men and women she had seen at Mr. Forbes', were the aims, objects, wishes, joys, and sorrows, of a different set of people to any with whom she had as yet been thrown in contact. Beyond her world was a different world, where passions and prejudices, griefs and pleasures, hopes and fears, that had hitherto been beyond her ken, reigned supreme.

Love, jealousy, envy, emulation, came and looked at her across the threshold; in that land some were princes and other beggars; some were queens of beauty, some were paupers in every social talent; some were rich, and others poor; some had more affection than they knew what to do with, cast at their feet, and more were going about searching for even tiny crumbs to satisfy their hunger.

Out and beyond the secure paddock in which she had hitherto browsed contentedly, Olivine looked over the broad fields of life, vaguely feeling as she did so, that those fields would have to be trodden in the future by her with willing or unwilling feet.

There comes a point, as I have said, where of necessity the streamlet meets the stream, where the brook merges itself in the river, where the tiny rill that has come down from the mountains, brawling over stones, dancing over the pebbles, leaps into the swelling flood and is lost to sight, and that point, which is reached sooner or later by all who are born of woman, had at last been touched by Olivine. Thenceforth, adieu to the moss and the grass, to the flowers and the pebbles, to the ferns and the weeds that grew beside the stream-

let of childhood, and dipped their leaves in its waters. Adieu to the unequal pace, to the leisurely curve round a favourite corner, to a dreamy sleep among the brambles, to a hurrying race down a steep descent, to the quiet of the small still pool lying behind the rock, to the musical dripping of the clear drops as they fell over the stones, and then wandered away singing sweetly as they glided on.

Adieu to the streamlet and welcome to the river; to the broad mysterious river, which hides in its depths all manner of ghastly corpses, and bears on its surface all sorts of goodly vessels, that spread their sails, and look bright and gay and brilliant in the sunshine. Adieu! She had come to the point where the two merge, and she could no more go back and return to the Olivine of old, than the streamlet can trickle back to its fountain, or than the river can flow from the sea to its source.

It was all true, and yet it was all shadowy; it was, as when we see in the gathering twilight a great town lying at the end of a road which we have set ourselves to travel. The town is then vague, indefinite, confused. We can distinguish no house; we can discern no spire; we can trace the outline of no dome, or tower, or palace. It lies there, shrouded by the mists of evening; lies there with its homes, its churches, its hospitals, its graveyards, its shops, its markets, its business, and its pleasures mixed up together, and confused into an undistinguishable mass.

And yet, because we know it is before us, our hearts, as we near that great, dim, shadowy something, throb with a quicker pulse, and the blood pours through our veins at a more rapid rate.

We could not tell what we think about that something as our feet bear us onwards towards its walls: there is not, I think, a man or a woman living, who would be able, for instance, to put into words his or her first impression of a great town — say London.

It is peopled by inhabitants that, as yet, know nothing of the new-comer who is drawing nigh to the modern Babylon; it has its houses, its dens, its failures, its prizes, its opportunities, its friends, its troubles and its pleasures, and yet no stranger could separate these items and think of them singly. It is all vague, like the future in which it is still lying — let the first view break upon a man either in the early morning, or when the whole scene is bathed and steeped in sunshine, or in the chill gloom of a winter's afternoon, or in the coming darkness of the night, it is all the same — the great city is but an indistinct mass in the distance; what it holds for any created being the wayfarer knows no more than he knows what the morrow may have in store for him.

The only one clear conviction he has alike about city and future is this, that both town, and hereafter, hold something for him which he is journeying forward to grasp. What he shall receive who can tell? Whether money or ashes, whether happiness or misery, whether favour or disappointment, he has no clearer idea than he has of the aspect of the town — the number of houses in each street; but neither from town nor from future shall he pass away empty; he shall, as the years go by, be filled with herbs of bitterness, or regaled with honey from the rock, with bread kneaded out of the finest flour.

For years — over the pathways of childhood,

across its pleasant fields, beside its leafy hedgerows, Olivine had sauntered dreamily on, till, behold! all at once she lifted her eyes, and there lay the city — there was that other world wherein men and women were living and loving, suffering and rejoicing, all the day long. What were the olden pathways to the child thenceforth? If she plucked flowers of promise and wreathed them together, were those garlands for her own eyes alone, think you? If she turned to her lessons and worked in the future, as Mrs. Gregory had never seen her work in the past, was it to acquire knowledge for her own amusement? — to wile away the hours of loneliness? Ah! no; she had crossed from girlhood into the frontier land of woman's estate; and a portion of woman's dowry had already been given to her — the desire to please, the wish to attract, the longing for admiration, the hope of securing affection.

Prematurely, perhaps, she reached the river, and yet with such a training, out of such a past, precocity was an evil almost to be anticipated.

Further, the majority of people at first note down the experiences of life as they learn handwriting from copies; and the copy which seems good and beautiful to the school-girl is rarely that which the woman would choose for her guide.

The copy Olivine, as a child, had rejected, she accepted in her girlish inexperience; the beauty she had failed to see formerly, she acknowledged with a great sinking at her heart. Between child and girl there could be no comparison, and the child was free to judge accordingly; between girl and woman the comparison instituted could not, Olivine felt, be satis-

factory to herself, and it came upon her like a revelation that beauty was power, that grace was a kingdom, that the authority which belles exercise is a lawful authority, conceded in virtue of some special loveliness of body, or ease of manner, or talent of mind, possessed by them in no ordinary degree.

And if she could only be a belle! Poor deluded Olivine!

Well, if the child grew a little conscious and unlike her former self, who shall say the transformation was unnatural?

Miss Alwyn came to Stepney Causeway, and, right or wrong, would carry off her new acquaintance to Hereford Street, where Olivine was literally stricken dumb with the luxury and the beauty that prevailed.

Did she wonder then, think you, at Lawrence being captivated? A princess wandering about the streets may be a very worthy and respectable young woman; but still, somehow, she proves unable to command the admiring veneration which a princess, surrounded by every adjunct of her station, rarely fails to inspire; and for this reason, when Olivine beheld Lawrence's ladye love enthroned in Hereford Street, she ventured one evening to hint to that young aspirant for matrimony her approval of his choice, and her own conviction that had she been a man she would have loved Miss Alwyn herself.

"Ah! you do not know Miss Alwyn," answered Lawrence, vaguely. Then he went on, more hurriedly, "What makes you all think I am engaged to her? Why do you all speak as if she were anything to me?"

"Why, is she not?" asked Olivine.

"Miss Alwyn flies at higher game than a poor clerk," answered Lawrence, a little bitterly; and then Olivine laughed at him, and spoke words which were very grateful to his vanity — words that implied a conviction on her part of there being nobody on earth like him — nobody so good, so clever, so patient, so perfect.

"And as for that Mr. Gainswoode," finished the girl, "I perfectly detest him. I cannot bear to hear him speak."

All of which was of course "nuts" to Mr. Lawrence Barbour, who would not have objected had Olivine held on in the same strain for an hour.

Good truth, had the girl been trying to catch his heart at the rebound, she could not have played her cards better. The woman who appreciates the virtues of an individual whose many admirable qualities are apparently scarcely understood by the lady of his choice, stands in a very good position for catching the ball as it is tossed back to him by its late possessor.

Given — that Henrietta Alwyn married Mr. Gainswoode, Lawrence Barbour was pretty nearly certain to marry Olivine Sondes, to give her what it might be she would soon stand in need of — protection, more especially, also, since Percy Forbes about the same time began endeavouring to gain an intimate footing in Stepney Causeway, and came oftener to Hereford Street when Olivine was visiting there, than either Miss Alwyn or Lawrence Barbour altogether approved.

"You will have to take great care of little Sondes," Henrietta remarked one day to Lawrence, as they sate alone together in the drawing-room at Hereford Street.

"I am greatly mistaken if Percy Forbes be not smitten there, and with those girls, you know, it is generally the first in the field."

"And how am I to take care of her?" inquired Lawrence. "Am I to ask Mr. Forbes his intentions, or arouse the vigilance of the young lady's uncle?"

"Neither," answered Miss Alwyn. "If you desire to secure the prize, you ought to endeavour to gain it. If you want to wear the girl, it is high time you set about winning her."

"And suppose I do not want either to wear or win her?" demanded Lawrence.

"Then my advice goes for nothing," was the reply; and Miss Alwyn stooped over her embroidery, while her face flushed painfully.

"Etta," he asked, "is it not time this farce between us was ended? You know I cannot love anybody besides you, whether girl or woman. You know you are to me sun, moon, stars, earth, and heaven. You know I am poor, and I know that you are rich; but still I love you. Always and ever lately you have been talking about my loving and marrying some one else, as though I could love or marry any one after seeing and knowing you."

He paused, but she never answered him. She only kept toying with her wools, twisting her needle round and round.

"You cannot but have known all this," he went on; "you cannot have been blind; you cannot but have seen why I came here constantly; how, through the years, I have worked with one single object, that of asking you to be my wife. I do not ask you to be my wife yet," he hurriedly proceeded; "I only pray

you to say you love me; to give me one word of hope and encouragement, and I will labour as I have never laboured before to achieve a position for your sake."

Still she never answered him; she never turned her head; never spoke nor made a sign till he stooped and kissed her. Then she let her face fall forward on her embroidery frame, and wept as she had never wept in all her life, while he vainly implored her to be calm — prayed her for the love of Heaven not to kill him with her silence and her grief.

"Only speak one word, Etta," he whispered, and she felt his breath hot on her cheek at the moment; "only say that in the future —"

"Lawrence Barbour," she interrupted; and she rose up, and put her hair back from her face, and looked at him with tear-dimmed eyes, as she answered, "Lawrence Barbour, why have you not spared me this? Have I not told you, as plainly as a woman could tell you, not to mention your love to me, but rather to take it elsewhere, to a girl who can love you in return and make you happy?"

"And if you have latterly given such a hint, and that I have declined to take it," he retorted, standing back from her a little, and looking at the prize which was bent on eluding him with a strange mixture of affection and rage, "what then?"

"Why, then you might have saved me pain and yourself mortification," she retorted. "I cannot marry you, because I am engaged to be married to Mr. Gainswoode."

"Since when?" he demanded.

"What can that concern you?" she returned. "Ac-

cept the fact and forget me, or else remember only that we have been good friends, and that I hope we shall continue to be good friends for ever."

She put out her hand and touched his, but he shook it off; then he seized it and covered it with kisses; then he prayed her, for God's sake, not to desert him, not to cast him off, not to make his life barren, his future objectless; "for I love you — yes, I love you," he said, in his passionate despair; "and you love me, Etta, I know you do."

She could not deny it; she tried to do so, but he beat the falsehood back from her lips with kisses; she could not blind herself to the truth that as she never had loved before, as she never might love again, she had cared for this vehement suitor, who would take no refusal, who would not be said nay, whose life was bound up in her life, who loved her, as such men do love women, with a devouring passion, with an enduring attachment.

"It cannot be," she said at last, growing in her extremity angry, in her resolution fixed. "It cannot be, and you have been mad ever to think it could be; to misconstrue our kindness, to think that I should ever obtain permission to marry you. Let go my hand, Mr. Barbour; I insist that you shall not detain me. It is not we who have led you astray; you have wilfully deceived yourself. In another month I shall be Mr. Gainswoode's wife, and it is not fitting I should listen to such words as you are now speaking to me. No, I do not love you; I never did love you; I never gave you any encouragement; I have endeavoured to show you by every means in my power that your hopes

were vain. Let me pass, if you please, sir; I wish to ring the bell."

"Allow me," Lawrence answered, and he laid his hand on the bell-rope, but without pulling it. "Am I, then, to take No for your final answer? — am I to understand that after all these years you mean to turn me adrift, without a hope."

"I do not wish to turn you adrift," she answered; "there is Olivine Sondes."

"It is you I am talking to," he said; "not Olivine; it is of you I am speaking, not of that child. Once for all, Yes or No, — for I will never importune a woman, I will never persecute her, as you call it, with my love. It is the last time of asking. Will you take my love, or will you reject it — Yes or No?"

For an instant she hesitated; the toy, if valueless, was still pretty, and she did not care to give it up; perhaps, too, she had never loved Lawrence so well as when he stood before her, angry and despairing, showing all the strength of his nature, all his love, his constancy, his suffering. She knew he would not ask her again, and the mere conviction of this fact made her pause.

Then "I am very sorry for you," she began.

"Never mind the sorrow," he interrupted; "Yes or No."

"No!" and she put up her hands as if to avert the storm which she saw coming, — but in vain. He stood there and cursed the day when he first beheld her, stood there and mocked her, laughed at himself for having been fooled by one like her, scoffed at the hair which had entangled him against his will, at the fair body which held so false a heart, at the wiles by which he had been captivated.

"It is all over," he said, "it is all done with. I take back the heart that you have left empty and worthless, and I bid you farewell."

Having finished which sentence he made her a mocking bow and left the room, closing the door behind him.

"Lawrence!" she cried, faintly, but Lawrence was gone.

CHAPTER II.

Down by the River.

It was summer again! just such another summer as that, during the course of which Lawrence Barbour had lain in hospital, and London looked its brightest and gayest; and in the country the fields stretched away, calm and green, and cool and pleasant, to woods standing still and stately, with a mellow light upon them under the noontide sun.

Down by the river it was pleasanter still, and Lawrence delighted in hurrying off by the train to Grays after the day's work was over, to breathe the fresh air, to catch the last rays of the setting sun shining on the Kentish hills, to watch the moon reflected in the waters, to shake the dust and dirt of London off his feet, and forget for a time business in pleasure.

"You have got wonderfully fond of the country all of a sudden," Mrs. Perkins remarked to him on one occasion, when he met her and Ada at the Stepney station. "Though you could never find time to run down and eat a chop with us when we were at Margate, nor take a cut out of our Sunday's joint (often as we

invited you), there is no want of leisure when it is to Mr. Sondes' you're asked. If Josiah was head-partner — which Lord knows he has worked hard enough to be over and over again — perhaps then Mr. Barbour might remember as how he had relations in the firm!"

At which juncture Ada came to the rescue. "Lor', ma!" she exclaimed, "it is not the firm Cousin Lawrence wants to see, but his young lady; and I am sure nobody could have the heart to keep him back from that." And Miss Ada, who had on the smallest bonnet, and the largest cane-crinoline which it had as yet fallen to Lawrence's lot to behold on a woman, even in Limehouse, lifted her head aloft and tossed it and her curls together, while she laughed a little idiotic laugh, and looked coquettishly at her cousin, who anathematised her in his heart.

"As for Miss Sondes —" commenced Lawrence.

"Oh! yes, indeed — as for Miss Sondes," interrupted Mrs. Perkins; "we all know what's in the wind there. Some people perhaps know too much, and it might be well for other people if they could believe their nieces were being looked after for their money;" and having completed this explicit and agreeable sentence, Mrs. Perkins, declaring she would be late for her train, bustled off up the London flight of steps with most undignified haste, followed by Ada, who nodded to Lawrence over the iron railing, and otherwise, as the young man considered, misconducted herself.

Circumstances alter cases: had Miss Alwyn, in the days when she was Miss Alwyn — before Mr. Gainswoode came, saw, and conquered, elected to kiss her hand to him from any staircase in Europe, Lawrence would have gone away enchanted with her condescen-

sion; but then Ada Perkins and Henrietta Alwyn were two very different personages — very different and very distinct indeed.

As for Mrs. Perkins' sneer — what did it signify to him? He knew as well as she did, he was travelling down to Grays in order to make love to Olivine Sondes, meaning eventually to marry her, and the words of no "old woman" (as such, I regret to say, he stigmatised Mrs. Perkins) could affect his purpose much.

But for all that, as the train sped on to Grays, he could not help running back over the years of his life and wondering — as we have all wondered at ourselves.

Was the old love dead, think you? Had the two years sufficed to kill that body? to dig a grave for it? to make Etta Alwyn a memory? No! Over and over and over again, no! — though since her marriage she had never seen him, and he had never seen her; though they had never exchanged greeting by word of mouth, or letter, or message, yet the old love was living, and breathing, and suffering still.

It was the mere name of a heart he was offering to the girl down by the river; and it may be — yes, it may — that, as he journeyed on, Lawrence felt some prickings of conscience about the lovely eyes which were lifted so often to his, appealingly, trustingly.

"But she is so fond of me, poor little simpleton," he thought, as he put up his feet on the opposite cushion and unfolded his *Times*, and drew the blue blind across to the exact number of inches that suited his convenience, "she is so fond of me," — and the man, who felt he had suffered a very much more grievous loss than Olivine was a gain, comforted him-

self with the idea of conferring happiness on her, and securing at the same time a very good position indeed for Lawrence Barbour.

Not but that he had a kind of sentiment for Olivine which was rather like love than otherwise. He felt very fond of her, more particularly when Percy Forbes was by. He entertained an impression that he held a kind of property in her, and was inclined to resent as a personal affront the idea of any other person wishing to gain her affections also.

Though it was his worst he was giving her; though it was the very ashes of the love he had felt for another woman that he was laying at her feet, still he required the whole of her love in exchange, and thought then, perhaps, the bargain was all in her favour.

Without a fortune, he would most probably not have thought her worth the exchange at all; but he did not say this even to himself, and Olivine, wandering with him over the green fields, and along the pleasant paths, and across the low chalk hills down by the river, was happy as a queen; while Mr. Sondes, contented and satisfied at last, looked on approvingly, and allowed matters to take their course.

He had his ideal of what a husband should be, and Lawrence to a great extent fulfilled that ideal. He wanted to see Olivine married to a man who would not sit down content with the fortune she brought him, but who would merely use it as a stepping-stone to greater worldly successes. He wanted a man, steady, resolute, of gentle blood, yet a worker, free from fashionable follies, aping no fashionable vices, who would see to his "little niece," and keep her safe from trouble and from temptation when the days came, that

might come any moment, in which he could be with her no more.

It was no detriment to Lawrence in his eyes that he had loved Miss Alwyn; rather, perhaps, Mr. Sondes considered it an advantage for him to have passed through such an experience before marriage. If he gave Olivine to this young man, he would save her from the same misery as her mother had endured.

Supposing that poor lady had chosen differently; married Mr. Sondes instead of his brother, how pleasant and happy her life would have been; and how much better it was for him to chose a husband like Lawrence Barbour for his niece, rather than any individual the world might consider more taking, such as Percy Forbes, for instance.

"A man without half Barbour's abilities," reflected Mr. Sondes; "who is a flirt — a mere butterfly, and who would spend Olivine's money as he once spent his own; who has not a thing to recommend him, even to women, except a handsome face! No, thank you, Mr. Forbes," thought Mr. Sondes; "my niece must decline the distinguished honour you are evidently desirous of conferring on her — and I only wish you would propose, that I might have an opportunity of telling you so."

But Percy Forbes did not propose; he saw where Olivine's heart had gone playing truant; and, feeling the game hopeless, he never tried to win it.

"Perhaps some day she may find him out," he decided; "find out he does not love her, but that I do," and so he set himself to wait patiently, and catch this heart at its rebound.

That which Olivine had done unconsciously, he did with deliberate intention. So the world goes! the dainty one man leaves untouched, another is greedy after; the bliss which rather bores the favourite of fortune, is hungered for by his unlucky fellow.

Dives, it may be, had never so keen and appreciative a relish of the meal whereat he fared sumptuously every day, as Lazarus of the crumbs which fell to his lot.

Happiness, we may fairly conclude, is like food. If a person cannot digest them, where is the good of the choicest viands? and probably it is because abstinence leaves the mental digestion in a healthy state, that those who enjoy few pleasures are better able to assimilate them, than their apparently more fortunate fellows, who have sat at the world's feast so long, that their appetites are cloyed, and their souls weary.

Besides, let a thing be ever so rich, or ever so rare, if you do not care for it, where is the profit?

If a woman be beautiful as Venus, and yet not the woman you love, what to you is the advantage? Inverting the sense of the old ballad a little, supposing she be not the fair that you admire, what does it signify to you how fair she be?

Let the wine be of the rarest vintage, and you desire water, shall the juice of the grape seem good to you? Let the thing proffered be more valuable, more beautiful, more perfect than the toy on which you have set your heart, what then? why, then, if you are a child, you fling the jewel from you, and cry for the toy; and if you are a man, you but keep the gold, and sorrow after the tinsel.

'Tis the same rue worn with a difference.

Two years had not, however, passed away for nothing. Lawrence's pain was dulled; his anguish less bitter; his disappointment a thing of the past; but, for all that, many a time he found himself recalling the misery he had endured, and thinking of Henrietta Alwyn as he never thought of Olivine Sondes.

He knew Olivine was Etta's superior in every womanly virtue; he saw she was pretty, unselfish, devoted, sweet; spring-flowers were not purer than she; all that a man could desire his wife and the mother of his children to be, Olivine was; but still he did not love her as she loved him, as he had loved Henrietta Alwyn.

Often when he was walking with Olivine along the field-paths and beside the river, when he, and she, and Mr. Sondes, and occasionally Percy Forbes, wended their way towards West Thurrocks, and here and there stood loitering, looking at the vessels going up to London, or starting off for distant ports, his thoughts were with the past rather than the present, in Hereford Street and at Mallingford End, instead of in Stepney Causeway, or the pleasant house at Grays.

Since the day when she refused him, he and Etta had never met. "No," was his last memory of her voice: the last picture of her photographed on his recollection was taken while she stood with her hands uplifted deprecating his anger.

How beautiful! ah, Heaven! what was this poor slight girl in comparison to that grand, stately, treacherous woman; but — well, "No one can have everything," as Percy Forbes took occasion to remark, a little bitterly; "if you cannot get cake, you must content yourself with bread," he added, thinking at the same

time how *he* would have valued the bread that Lawrence deemed almost beneath his acceptance.

"It was that reflection made you come due east, I suppose, when you got your eight thousand pounds," retorted Lawrence; "not that you have bought so particularly much bread, it seems to me, for your money. Considering I started with nothing, I think I have done a vast deal better than you; though you have got a precious comfortable berth, still you are shelved, and no mistake about the matter."

"A hare and a tortoise once ran a race," replied Percy: "perhaps you can remember which won, and despite your polite remarks about my slow rate of progress, and deficiency in those gifts which have been showered pretty liberally on you, it may happen hereafter that I shall still reach the winning-post before you.

"I advise you not to try a race with me," retorted Lawrence, with a sudden anger.

"Then either go on or leave the course clear," answered Percy Forbes. "It is not fair to block up the road another man wants to travel."

"I shall travel my own road at my own pace," retorted Lawrence; "and should recommend you not to attempt to dictate either to me."

"'It is a free country;' for which original remark I am indebted to Mrs. Perkins," was the reply.

Whereupon Lawrence grew pale with rage, and asked Percy "why the devil," if he was so fond of Mrs. Perkins as to be continually talking about her, he did not marry Ada, and then they could all live together at Reach House.

"Ah! my dear fellow, your charming cousin would not care for so obscure a destiny. Like you, she believes in progress, not in a mere competency, which, being all I have to offer to any woman, compels me to celibacy."

And Percy looked for a moment actually grave. He thought of the sweet face that never brightened for him, of the eyes that never lighted up when he came in sight, of the cheeks that never coloured at his approach, of the girl who had no love to give him, but who loved this other man with all the strength of her nature.

From that day Lawrence began seriously to think of marrying Olivine — thought of doing so without any reluctance, but rather with some degree of pleasure. He was weary of lodgings; he wanted to have a home, a house of his own; he could not blind himself to the fact that Olivine would be a capital match; and he began to think it was time for him to commence making more rapid steps towards fortune than had hitherto been the case. He could not go on being a clerk for ever; he knew he should not be able to keep up the pace at which he had hitherto travelled much longer. His health was never likely to be good; he had those attacks occasionally which promised some day completely to prostrate him. After Miss Alwyn's rejection, he had fought with his troubles, and stuck to his work, and turned a defiant face on a world which would have sympathised with him; and the effort had done him no good. He had spent his strength in trying to meet his sorrow like a man; and no one — none save Olivine Sondes — ever knew how heavily the blow had fallen, how deep the wound had been.

He had let her pity him, and her pity and sympathy were grateful; he had told her of Miss Alwyn's perfidy, because he knew Miss Alwyn would not hesitate to give her version of his presumption. He allowed the girl to talk to him about Mr. Gainswoode and Mallingford End, and he found the talk mournfully comforting. Olivine went down to stay at Mallingford, and had a whole budget of news to unfold on her return.

"And she is so sorry you will not visit them," Olivine finished. "She told me to say, with her kindest remembrances, that she and Mr. Gainswoode would be delighted if you would go down there, if it were but for a couple of days. And do not you think you could, since she wishes it, and seems so vexed about never seeing you, now?"

"Ah! Olivine," he answered, "it would have been well for me if I had never seen her at all."

"But you know you cannot help that now; and being friends with her could not do you any harm, could it?"

"It could not do me any good," he replied; "not half the good that talking to you does, at all events."

"Do you really like talking to me?" she asked.

"To be sure I do," he replied.

"I cannot imagine why," she said, simply. "I must seem so dull and stupid to you, who are so quick and clever."

Lawrence laughed. "I am not going to spoil you with flattery, sweet," he replied; and then the pretty face was unconsciously bent down a little to hide her pleasure, and Olivine ran about the house with a

lighter step, with a more elastic tread, after his departure.

And so, finally, as I have said, when two years had passed by, Lawrence found himself going constantly down to Gray's; hurrying away from London and business, from Stepney and Limehouse, and money and office and ledger, to spend his evenings with Mr. Sondes and Olivine, and to find a pleasure undreamed of before in the rest and quiet of the country.

For the man was weary — there could be no question about that — weary of the eternal work, of the everlasting grind, of the whirl of London life, of the din and the noise, of the mental wear and tear, of the continual turmoil; and he was wont, when the train had once fairly reached the outskirts of the town, to settle himself down to the enjoyment of rural sights and sounds with a keen physical relish, which is only perhaps to be earned by long sojourn and incessant labour of head or hand in a great city.

The very smell of the earth was grateful to him: the sight of the grass, of the shining river, of the green knolls, of the white chalk cliffs about Purfleet, of the little plantation on the top of the hill lying between the station and the river, affected his heart in those days as the sight of very much more lovely scenery failed to touch it in after days.

Many and many a time, when grievous sickness fell upon him in the years which were then to come, Lawrence Barbour felt the peace of that sinless summer come back and brood over his soul, come back and bring a blessing with it.

Up to that point his life, since he fairly settled to

business, had been rushed through at express pace. He had worked hard all day; he had danced attendance in Hereford Street in the evenings; and when once Hereford Street began to know him no more, office and laboratory beheld him labouring away continually.

"I will get rich," he thought, "for my own sake. I used to work for *her*, but now I will work for myself." And he did work, till Mr. Sondes, saying he would have to lie up to a certainty if he refused to have mercy on either mind or body, bade him leave the office every evening in time to catch the last down-train and come to them at Grays.

"What good is money without health?" he finished; and your health is none so strong, that you need be playing tricks with it. Do as I tell you. The end of the year will not find you the poorer for a little idleness."

So Lawrence travelled every night to Grays, where he and Olivine sang together in the cheerful pretty sitting-room that commanded a view of the river, while Mr. Sondes looked out upon the garden, and thought about the lovers, hoping all the time he had made no mistake — that Lawrence would be able and willing to keep his darling from the evil to come.

But still the young man dallied with his happiness, and Mr. Sondes became impatient, and growing restless and irritable, began to encourage Percy Forbes' visits, and to talk more with him as they walked across the fields than he had ever done to Lawrence.

There was some knowledge lying between the pair in which the favoured lover did not participate: Lawrence grew anxious and uneasy, and his dislike of

Percy Forbes increased daily, and he decided that he must know for certain whether Olivine was to be his or not; he must take the final leap, and bind himself. Well, the fate was not so hard an one. With Etta Alwyn a memory, the reality of Olivine was not completely disagreeable. He should have a pleasant home, a sweet, gentle wife; something once again to work for; he would speak to Mr. Sondes that very evening: and he carried out his intention; he took opportunity under the moonlight to talk to his employer in the garden and prefer his petition.

"What I am saying may seem presumptuous," he proceeded, rather disconcerted by Mr. Sondes' continued silence. "I know I am poor; that it must appear to you a wretched match for your niece; but still, if you give her to me, I will try to make her happy; to be to her all you have been."

"You could not," answered Mr. Sondes; "no man could be to her what I have been; no man, whether father or husband, or brother or son, could ever love that child as I have loved her. She has been the one thought of my life; what woman is the one thought of her husband?"

"She shall be my one thought," said Lawrence; "whom have I beside her on earth? If you think, because I once was fond of Miss Alwyn, that I cannot give your niece a better love, you are mistaken. Let me only show you how faithfully I will discharge my trust. Let me only prove I have outlived my folly; let me only work for her; give me some great thing to do, and I will do it. Surely, sir, you must have seen what the result would be; you cannot have meant to raise my hopes only to dash them down again."

"No," answered Mr. Sondes; "but yet I fear. Let us walk down towards the river," he added, abruptly; and in the bright moonlight Olivine saw them loiter slowly to the water's edge, talking as they went.

When they came back an hour afterwards Mr. Sondes looked relieved and Lawrence happy. It was all settled; if Olivine were willing to have him, Lawrence Barbour had permission to marry her. Mr. Sondes had told him what he would do for them. He would not have any one marry his child for her money, and he told Lawrence as much; neither should she go to any man penniless, nor should any penniless man wed her; — but — said Mr. Sondes,

"Consider yourself from to-night a partner to the extent of one-fourth in my business, whether you marry Olivine or whether you do not. She has her own fortune — a small one; but what I have to leave behind me I shall in all human probability not bequeath to her. Think the matter well over. Remember, I mean precisely what I say — so much and no more — and make up your mind accordingly. If you love my niece for her own self, marry her; if you do not, for God's sake leave her the chance of becoming hereafter the wife of some one who will love her disinterestedly. Did I not believe you would strive to make her happy, that you would be faithful to, and tender with her, I would rather cut out my tongue than give my consent to your marrying her. She has never heard a harsh or an unkind word, remember. Perhaps I have reared her too tenderly for her future peace, but I did it for the best; and it is too late to repair the error, if it really were one."

"She shall be to me as she has been to you,"

answered Lawrence; and he meant what he said — meant it then, every sentence: and the more he thought about the matter the more steadily resolved he felt to cherish Olivine very tenderly. He had no doubt about her acceptance of him, and no doubt on that point had seemed to have ever occurred to Mr. Sondes.

It is not a particularly dignified attitude for a heroine, that of waiting to be asked; and yet that there was anything singular in it, or that he ever should come to think less of her in consequence, were ideas which never crossed Lawrence's mind.

She had loved him from a child, and he would take her now she was a girl and try to give her a better affection than he had ever felt for Henrietta Alwyn.

If he searched England through for a wife, where could he find anything softer, sweeter, more amiable than Olivine? In a dream he walked about London. With his thoughts at Grays, he attended to business, and answered letters, and tried experiments, and spoke to customers, till at last the time came for leaving off work for the week, and going down to the river's side for Saturday evening, for the whole of Sunday, and Sunday night.

He was rather late in arriving at the station; he had but time to show his ticket and jump into a carriage before the train started.

Quite by accident he had chosen his carriage, and yet the moment he dropped into his place he beheld Percy Forbes seated opposite to him.

"Where are you off to?" he inquired.

"I am going to Grays; where are you off to?" retorted Mr. Forbes.

"Grays also," answered Lawrence, sulkily; and he took refuge behind his newspaper. The little town had already in his opinion seen enough and too much of Mr. Percy Forbes; and, had he dared, he would have ventured to hint this impression to Mr. Sondes.

Not daring, however, to intimate anything of the kind, he vented his displeasure on his companion, and treated him during the journey with such marked coldness, that Percy was forced to take refuge in the pages of a time-table, and devote himself to the study of express trains and parliamentaries, of rates of carriage, and the charge for horse-boxes.

"Are you going to stay with the Sondes'?" asked Lawrence, laying down his newspaper when they were within a few miles of Grays.

"No, I am not," answered Percy, without lifting his eyes from his time-table; and not another word was exchanged between them till they said "Good evening" on the platform.

"My way lies in this direction," remarked Mr. Forbes, and he crossed the line and walked slowly down past the church, into the principal s reet of the town.

"I am delighted to hear it," thought Lawrence; and he took the upper road, which led him to Mr. Sondes' house.

Before the evening was ended, however, Percy Forbes called to see his friends; and whilst Lawrence and Olivine loitered together in the garden, the two

men sat in the pleasant drawing-room, talking earnestly.

"I have given my consent," Mr. Sondes remarked at length, "and if she likes to have him she shall. I am grieved for you, Mr. Forbes, but ——"

"Do not speak of that," Percy answered, gently; but he rose and walked towards the window, and remained looking out over the fields and the river without seeing anything very distinctly for a minute or two, before he added another word. "I would have tried to make her happy," he said, at length, and then he sat down, and covered his face with his hand, like one who, having received a heavy blow, tries to bear the pain patiently and in silence.

"Never mention it to her," he entreated, at last. "I should not wish her to know what suffering her sweet face has caused," and he looked up at Mr. Sondes with such an expression of anguish on his usually gay countenance, that the elder man's heart was touched.

"Mr. Forbes," he said, "I think I have never done you justice," and a terrible doubt swept across his mind as to whether he had not after all made a mistake.

"I am afraid you have," answered Percy, dolefully; "but yet I think, had I married a wife like her," and he turned his eyes towards the garden as he spoke, "I might have made something of my future still. Well, it was not to be — it was not to be."

Who that night was gayer than Percy Forbes? who talked so fast and talked so well; who told so many stories, or seemed so utterly careless and light-hearted? who could have promised more readily to go to church with them the next day and return to

dinner? and yet there came a moment just before his departure, when he stood at the gate with Mr. Sondes, and said, with his face looking pale and troubled in the moonlight, —

"It is all settled, I see; and my chance, poor as it was, is lost."

"There are others in the world."

"No doubt," was the reply; "for others, but not for me."

"I am sorry," Mr. Sondes repeated.

"I wish you would not be sorry," answered Percy; "so long as she is happy, what does it signify?" and he wrung Mr. Sondes' hand, and turned to go away.

"One second, Forbes; you will remember your promise ——"

"I will, and keep it implicitly," was the reply, and with that sentence still trembling on his lips, he left the house which held her, and went down the hill, and along the lower road, and up the main street, and so back to his inn.

And Mr. Sondes remained at the gate, watching his retreating figure till it disappeared from sight. Under the moonlight he stood thinking his own thoughts, which were not pleasant thoughts, till Olivine came softly behind him, and said, "Uncle!"

"Yes, love," he answered, absently.

"Won't you kiss me?" she asked, and she took his hand, and crept close up to his side. "Lawrence says you know — that is, you told him ——"

"In plain words, I am to lose you, darling," and he clasped her to his heart, and kissed her over and over and over again, while the big tears, rolling down his cheeks, fell on her face.

"What a simpleton I am," he said at last; "what a stupid, foolish, weak old man," and he kissed her again, and led her back into the house.

"Uncle," she sobbed, "you will never lose me; no one could ever separate me from you."

"Hush, hush, love — I know that; it was but my folly. Kiss me once more, Olivine. And now we will be wise people — wise and sensible, like our neighbours."

Re-entering the drawing-room, he held out his hand in silence to Lawrence, and so the thing was settled; and the trio sat together for a little time looking out at the moon shining on the river — on the river which was gliding away so surely though so gently, towards the sea!

CHAPTER III.

Lawrence Understands.

But few of my readers are likely to be acquainted with even the external appearance of the parish church of Stepney — with that St. Dunstan's which is really much more St. Dunstan's-in-the-East than Sir Christopher Wren's famous lantern edifice — with that St. Dunstan's where the stone from Carthage makes its prosaic lamentation in very bad poetry — where The Spectator found food for satire — where Dame Rebecca Berry, the fortunate heroine of "The Fish and the Ring," sleeps that sleep which no dreams of romance come to disturb — where rests an individual who has chosen to send his name down to posterity in the following fashion: —

"Whoever treadeth on this stone,
I pray you tread most neatly;
For underneath the same doth lie
Your honest friend Will Wheatley" —

where another person has even less weight of epitaph, and remains content with assuring us that —

"Here lies the body of Daniel Saul,
Spitalfields weaver, and that is all" —

where, in fact, there is much which is old, interesting, and instructive, surrounded by a vast deal more which is very modern, very sad, and very repelling.

Great at one time was the parish of Stepney, comprising as it did, Limehouse, Stratford-le-Bow, Bethnal Green, Spitalfields, Poplar, Shadwell, and St. George's-in-the-East. Wide were its boundaries, vast its extent: it reached down to the Thames; it wandered beside the Lea; it stretched right away into London; it gathered in its tithes from north, east, south, and west; the shadow of that old grey tower lay across many a field; its priests garnered the tenth of all the corn that grew and ripened over many a wide acre of country.

Time was when St. Dunstan's stood in the centre of a large tract of arable, marsh, meadow, and pasture land. Seventy years since, even after the parish had been grievously shorn of its fair proportions — after its size was curtailed, and district upon district taken out of its once vast extent — there were fifteen hundred and thirty acres still unbuilt over — fifteen hundred acres that are now covered thick with houses — filled to overflowing with densely packed human beings.

It is not a genteel neighbourhood at this moment of writing. The pleasant houses of the old citizens

who used to repair to Stepney for change of air, and to enjoy the delights of the country, are gone almost without exception. The quaint red brick mansions, the shady gardens, the winding walks, the sheltered paddocks, the rich meadows, these things are phantoms and memories of the long ago. Streets cover the green fields of a few years since; lines and lines of small houses have obliterated the former land-marks, have changed the appearance of the whole neighbourhood. The little village of Stibenhede, lying some distance out of town, is now a part and parcel of the great Babylon itself. The most countrified-looking portion of Stepney is at present its graveyard; — the only vestige of respectable or picturesque antiquity which the parish contains is its church.

And that stands dark and still the same as ever. It stands among the houses, as it once stood in the midst of the sweet country, with its grey hoary tower rearing itself against the sky; and the bells, the sweet sounds whereof formerly floated over garden and meadow and marsh land, now ring out amidst brick and mortar and stone — now peal joyously or toll mournfully, in the ears of men and women who reside where the lark once made her lonely nest, where cowslips grew and cattle browsed, in the days when London and the din thereof were things that lay far away from St. Dunstan's and Stepney.

Now, friends, the fifteen hundred acres are built over; there are streets where there were field-paths, alleys where there were hedgerows; there is a great population of struggling men and careworn women congregated together around the old church where Olivine

Sondes and Lawrence Barbour became in due time man, and wife.

Their wedding was no private affair, transacted in a corner, effected by means of a couple of carriages, a sleepy clergyman, a disgusted clerk, and an indignant pew-opener. That was no ceremony huddled over as though the pair felt properly ashamed of themselves, and desired to let the world know as little of their folly as might be. In the midst of the congregation the twain were married. From amongst a select body of respectable parishioners collected inside the church, and a mob of ragged urchins and questionable roughs gathered about the gates, perched on the low wall surrounding the graveyard, holding on by the iron railings, and scattered over the tombs, Lawrence Barbour, surrounded by his friends, and her friends, bore away his girl-wife, proudly and gracefully enough.

Reversing the usual rule, he grew very fond of Olivine after he was engaged to her; he came to love her with the same kind of love as a man who has had a hard, stormy, exciting life gets in time to feel for the sweet home-rest, for the great peace of a quiet domestic existence.

With her there were no storms nor tempests, no dark quarrels, no great bursts of sunshine. It was all like the calm of a still summer evening; it was all first-love, and adoration and clinging affection on the one side, and on the other, something which was very like love, and which promised to supply the place of that rather uncertain passion to admiration.

Lawrence himself, at all events, was satisfied; so were Olivine and Mr. Sondes, and the spectators and the bridal party, with the exception it might be, of

Percy Forbes, who, standing back a little, among the least honourable guests, lifted his eyes for a moment when Lawrence and Olivine became man and wife, and looked first at him, and then at her, and then fixedly, at Mr. Sondes.

It was a curiously comprehensive look, and there was something peculiar about it, which attracted the attention and aroused the curiosity of more than one person in the church.

"Whatever, Mr. Forbes, were you a-staring at Mrs. Barbour for, so particular?" asked Mrs. Jackson, getting Percy pinned up against a pew-door, and putting the question in a flutter of feminine amazement.

"I wanted to see how a bride looked at the especial moment when she leaves hope behind," answered Percy, lightly. "Frankly, I must say I think a woman accepts the inevitable, with more resignation than a man. It is an interesting study that of bride, and bridegroom. I shall probably pursue it in other churches."

"What a character you are!" exclaimed Mrs. Jackson.

"A good one, I hope," he returned; and then he followed the bridal party into the vestry, and beheld Olivine signing, with a pretty confusion, her maiden name for the last time. When she finished she chanced to look up, and caught Percy's glance fixed upon her; and over the heads bent down to scrutinise the signatures in the registry, she smiled at her old friend with a sweet abashed timidity.

She was losing her courage, and he saw it; she was turning on the very threshold of her new life to look half-regretfully on the life which might never be more; and over the heads, through the little crowd, he

smiled back and nodded encouragingly, and the young thing took heart again.

She passed close by where he stood when she walked down the aisle clinging to Lawrence's arm, but she never knew till the years were come and gone, that he had caught a fold of her white dress as it touched him in her progress — caught it just for a moment in his despair at feeling she had gone from him for ever.

What a sweet, young, girlish, innocent creature she was, floating away from him in a cloud of white; strangers even turned to look at her; the aged women who thronged the free seats said she looked just like an angel; and Percy Forbes, who heard one of them utter this remark, and felt that it exactly expressed his own thought in the matter, gave the old crone a sovereign, and left her standing in the church-porch in a state of wonderment unspeakable.

There was a goodly company bidden to the wedding-breakfast. Olivine's few relatives were there, and all Lawrence Barbour's kindred to the third and fourth generations. He had taken care to let it be generally known amongst his people that Olivine was not merely an heiress, but that she had gentle blood in her veins to boot; and that, moreover, he himself had every chance of some day becoming a millionaire.

All of which proved irresistible. From far and from near the Barbours came flocking; and Stepney Causeway and the Commercial Road saw that day such a sight of carriages, and coachmen, and footmen, and grand gentlemen and great ladies, as astonished the minds of the juvenile population, and caused many a workman to stand open-mouthed looking at the show,

when he should have been making better use of the hour allotted to him for dinner.

"Yes," remarked Lawrence Barbour to Mr. Perkins, while he surveyed his fashionable relatives with a certain contempt, "they can come fast enough now; but if you had not helped me up, I think I might have waited long enough for the pleasure of their society;" and he wrung Mr. Perkins' hand as he spoke, and Mr. Perkins wrung his in return, for the chemist felt pleased and gratified at this, the most grateful speech he had ever heard his kinsman utter.

Quite in a flutter, with visions of heaven knows what splendid future looming before him, — with a dim idea of becoming a Barbour of Mallingford once more, — with a strange sense of being at once a very insignificant, and a very important performer in the day's proceedings, — Mr. Barbour senior came up at this juncture to the window where Mr. Perkins and Lawrence stood talking together, and would have shaken hands with the former but that the chemist, turning very red, buried his hands in the very depths of his trousers' pockets, trying hard all the while to look as though he did not think Mr. Barbour had intended it.

Truth was, the chemist could not forget the manner in which the country gentleman had repelled his friendly advances in the days that were gone. Humble though he might be, he had felt, and felt keenly, the freezing civility, the immeasurable superiority, the intense pride of Mr. Barbour's demeanour when Mr. Barbour came up to see Lawrence in the hospital.

"I can be friendly to a man always," Mr. Perkins remarked subsequently to his partner, "or I can be friendly to a man never; but I cannot be both;" at

which observation Mr. Sondes laughed, and said, "You know a good deal of chemistry, but you know very little of the world."

"If blowing hot one day, and cold, the next, constitutes knowledge of the world, I do not wish to change my ignorance," Mr. Perkins retorted, and Mr. Sondes laughed again.

But at a later period of the entertainment, after the happy pair had left for the Continent, after a considerable number of toasts had been honoured, and speeches made, and champagne swallowed, Mr. Perkins, seeing how Mr. Barbour was neglected by his grand kinsfolk, how it was in honour of the man who had won the first heat in the Race for Wealth, and not out of respect to his father, or because of any sentiment concerning blood being thicker than water, that the notables had honoured the East End with their presence; seeing these things, I say, the chemist relented and went and talked to Mr. Barbour, who was somewhat broken down in those days, physically as well as mentally.

And Mr. Barbour felt grateful to Mr. Perkins for his good nature. Vaguely he understood that the old Barbour of Mallingford — who had spent freely, who, having inherited a mortgaged property, had not been wise in time, who was but the least branch of a very poor and unprofitable tree — seemed amazingly insignificant in the eyes of a new generation, who worshipped a much more prosaic, and tangible god, than Birth.

There was Edmund, now — Edmund, who had never soiled his hands with trade, nor taxed his brain with arithmetic, nor lived in the East End, nor done anything greatly unbefitting a gentleman and a curate

— there was Edmund who had assisted that very morning in tying the knot matrimonial, and nobody took much notice even of him.

The world Mr. Barbour once knew had gone; the good old times were for him a legend of past; the son he had tried to keep back from independence and wealth was of more social importance than himself; and all these views the old man, weeping abundantly, confided at a subsequent period to Mr. Perkins.

"My opinion of the matter being," observed Mrs. Perkins to her inferior half, "that you had both of you had twice too much wine;" which opinion was the harder to bear patiently since Mr. Perkins chanced to have been exceedingly moderate in his evidences of enthusiasm, and Mrs. Perkins rather the reverse.

As for Ada, the extent to which that young person ate, and drank, and giggled, and flirted with Percy Forbes, who chanced to be the only man present who had the happiness of her acquaintance, filled her father with an unspeakable shame.

He had never seen his daughter in society before, and he certainly had never thought less of her in his life.

"My dear," he ventured to Mrs. Perkins, after their return home, "do you not think that if Ada were a little quieter ——"

"Now, there you go," interrupted his wife; "it is so like men to be always interfering with every bit of innocent enjoyment a girl has, and to be wanting to keep back their children's high spirits, poor things. What was I like when you married me, before trouble and the cares of a family broke me down, and made the drudge of me I am? What was I like?"

Which, being a question incapable of receiving a complimentary answer, Mr. Perkins shirked by saying, "That he really could not remember."

"There's love for you!" exclaimed Mrs. Perkins, addressing an imaginary audience; "there's a husband! It is no wonder Mr. Sondes treats me like dirt, when the man I married, whose children I am the mother of, says he cannot remember what I was like when he first popped the question. And it seems to me only like yesterday since you and me was walking home together —"

"I recollect all that," interrupted Mr. Perkins, hastily; "but our courtship has nothing to do with Ada. I do not want to see her dull or moping; still I wish she would keep herself a little more to herself."

"You'd like to see her such another as that Olivine Sondes, or Mrs. Lawrence Barbour, as I must call her now, I suppose?" retorted Mrs. Perkins; "you'd want to pinch your daughter into just such another piece of melancholy and affectation; but if that's your notion, Josiah, of a nice girl, it's not mine. If you can turn against your own flesh and blood, it is more nor I can do; if you have the heart to put a strait-waistcoat on a young creature's high spirits and natural liveliness, I won't stand by and see it done. Whoever comes and marries our Ada, won't come and marry her for her money, I hope. I don't want to say anything reflecting on you, Josiah, or hurtful to your feelings, but when a young man is jilted by one young lady, and takes up right away with another, people will talk. I am sure when Lawrence asked Mr. Alwyn to-day how his daughter was, his face quite changed. I'd have been sorry to see any one as was a-going to marry our Ada turn like

ashes in a minute, and drink cold water as he did. I declare it gave me quite a faint feeling. 'Do you see that?' I says to Mr. Forbes.

"'See what?' says he.

"'The bridegroom's face;' and he turned and looked, and understood it all before you could count ten.

"'It is one of his old attacks,' he answered, quite careless like; but I knew the kind of old attack it was, and so did Mr. Forbes.

"'I hope she'll be happy,' I said, to try him what he thought.

"'God grant it;' and it was wonderful the serious manner he had with him.

"'But still I think as there's a lady he'd rather have had without a shilling than Olivine Sondes, if she was made of gold.'"

"Now, quit that." It was Mr. Perkins who spoke the words; but Mrs. Perkins could not have recognised his voice, it was so changed by anger, so thick with passion. "Quit that, I say!" and he struck his clenched hand on the table, making the tea-cups rattle with his violence; "if you cannot speak without making mischief, hold your tongue; if you cannot use your eyes without seeing something to make other people miserable, I had rather you were blind at once. What has Lawrence done to you that you should call him a mercenary villain? How has Olivine injured you that you should say things of her husband which would make her wretched for life if they came round to her ears? Don't let me hear any more such woman's gossip, don't, I warn you;" and Mr. Perkins left the room and shut the door after him with a bang.

"Well, did you ever?" said Mrs. Perkins, once again addressing an imaginary audience; and silence seeming to give consent that the imaginary audience never had, Mrs. Perkins poured out another cup of tea and solaced herself therewith.

Mr. Alwyn likewise had been of the number of the guests, and made merry at Lawrence's expense.

"Did not we always say how it would be?" he asked the bridegroom. "From the time I saw Miss Sondes first at Grays, I thought it would be a match. How I wish Etta had been in England to have made one of us to-day. Perhaps you may see her abroad. If you make any stay in Paris, be sure you let her know, that she may call on your wife. Promise me you will, there's a good fellow. Are you off? Pleasant journey; God bless you! Good-by, Mrs. Barbour, and God bless you. Ah! we always said how it would end."

With which piece of prophetic wisdom Mr. Alwyn appeared to be so delighted, that he repeated how he had always said it would be a match, to almost every person in the room.

"Yes," he declared to Mr. Perkins, "I felt confident Sondes would marry his niece to Barbour, and keep her near him. A confoundedly good thing it must be for Barbour; he has made a capital hit, anyhow."

"He has worked very hard," Mr. Perkins ventured to insinuate.

"He has worked too hard," answered Mr. Alwyn; "he could not have held on at the same pace much longer. After all, the best thing possible for him was doing precisely what he has done. A pretty wife — wealthy uncle — good business. I suppose you are

making your five or six thousand a-year out of Distaff Yard, Perkins?"

"I wish we were," said Mr. Perkins, simply.

"Nonsense, man; you must be coining there."

"If we are, it is coppers, then," was the reply. "The commissioners are so sharp on us now, we have to alter our processes every week. There used to be a fair profit on thorough good articles; but the trade is not worth having, pestered to death as we are. If it were not for Lawrence, I think we must have closed long ago; but he delights in cheating the analysers. He adds and he takes away, and keeps them in a continual ferment. Pity he had not gone in for regular chemistry. He might have made a name and a fortune to talk about."

"Would not have had health for it," answered Mr. Alwyn.

"Yes he would, when he first came to London," replied Mr. Perkins.

"Thank you, sir, for reminding me of his misfortune and of our obligation," said Mr. Alwyn, drawing himself up. "It was not necessary, however. I have never forgotten the debt I owe him. I am never likely to forget it."

Whereupon Mr. Perkins declared he meant nothing by his remark; it was simply a remark, and nothing more; he intended no sneer, and he trusted Mr. Alwyn would not think he had desired to convey the slightest reproach.

"Don't say another word of apology," said Mr. Alwyn, completely mollified by Mr. Perkins' humility. "I am certain you did not mean it — that the remark was unintentional; you can understand how we feel in

the matter. You know it must be rather a sore subject. If," went on Mr. Alwyn, with a poor attempt at a smile, "if I had been a millionaire, and able to give my daughter to a struggling man, why, then the end of the story might have been different. Or if Barbour could have got a partnership, perhaps some arrangement — eh? you understand. As things turned out, however, what was I to do? Etta had been accustomed to every luxury, to every conceivable comfort. She never could have endured poverty, or even mere competence. It would have been misery for both — utter misery. Still, you know, they ought to have been able to marry; things ought somehow to have turned out all right for them. Not but what I think Barbour will be happier as it is. Still, for all that, you know when a man perils his life for a woman, he naturally expects some return; and I fear he, poor fellow, at one time did feel disappointed. I wanted to say this to somebody belonging to him, and I hope we shall all be good friends. Perhaps you will some day understand that I could not help it, and that this is a better match for your relative in every way. And if I ever can be of any use to you or him, or his wife, or your wife, come to me without hesitation. There — there — don't thank me; it is nothing. God bless you. I hope you'll do well."

"I wonder if his mind is going," was Mr. Perkins' inward commentary on this speech; and he thought the matter over and over, till at last he decided there was some fresh screw loose — that the house of Alwyn and Allison must be tottering.

"Do you not think Mr. Alwyn is looking very ill?"

he asked his partner. "He seems to me so worn, and haggard, and strange."

"He is either going into his grave, or the Bankrupt Court," answered Mr. Sondes; "perhaps both."

The same idea had occurred to Lawrence, and he thought much oftener during his honeymoon of Mr. Alwyn and Mr. Alwyn's affairs than Olivine would exactly have approved, had she been able to read his mind.

As it was, she took what measure of attention Lawrence accorded her gratefully; knowing no better, she thought the love he gave her was all he had to give, and felt satisfied. If, after a few weeks, he grew restless and desirous of returning to London, it never occurred to the young wife that he was tired of her. He was very kind to, and thoughtful for, her. He had made up his mind that he would be a good and faithful husband, but still day by day he became more and more conscious that such love as he had once felt for Etta Alwyn he could never feel for Olivine; and day by day he grew more afraid of looking into his own heart, lest he should find that already he repented him of marrying.

It was pleasant to be worshipped as Olivine worshipped him; to be loved wholly and entirely by even such a young, unformed, simple creature; it was delicious to feel she believed in him perfectly; thought him the best, and the cleverest, and the kindest of created beings; but it was not so pleasant to be bound for life to love and cherish in return.

Honeymoons, he decided, were mistakes. If he had never been thrown so completely on his wife's society, he would never have found out half of what

was in his heart concerning her. He would get back to London, and to work. He longed for the busy life, for the occupied minutes once again. He was sick of idleness, weary of a holiday which had grown tedious in the extreme. He looked for his letters with eagerness; he read news from the old business world with avidity; he was much more interested in hearing of orders, than in listening to Olivine's ecstasies.

"I think," said Mr. Perkins, in one of his brief epistles, "you had better not prolong your stay beyond the month, as Mr. Sondes is far from well; and things will go to the deuce in Goodman's Fields, if there is not some one to see to them."

How Lawrence blessed his kinsman for that sentence! "Olivine, dearest, your uncle is not very well," he remarked, knowing perfectly what the result would be.

"Not well!" she echoed, "what is the matter? Will you go home? May we go back at once? Oh! Lawrence, don't think me selfish, but I cannot be happy here any longer. Is he very ill? Is he able to attend to business? What is the matter?"

"Mr. Perkins does not say," answered Lawrence. "Here is a letter from Forbes — perhaps he tells us something more;" and the young man opened the envelope and read on in silence, Olivine standing before him, and waiting for particulars.

"Here it is," Lawrence continued, at last, — "'Mr. Sondes is not at all well, has not been out of the house for a week. He will not allow me to send for you, but that is no reason why you should not know of his illness and use your own discretion.'"

"Have you heard of Alwyn's failure? such a smash! and not a sixpence of personal property. Mallingford belongs to Mr. Gainswoode, and the creditors are in such a rage. Gainswoode bought it from his father-in-law when he married Miss Etta."

"What is the matter? what more does he say about my uncle?" asked Olivine in affright, for she saw her husband's face change as he read the latter paragraph to himself.

"He does not say anything more about your uncle, love," Lawrence answered; "upon my word he does not, Olivine. I read you every syllable that concerns him; all the rest is a business matter — entirely business;" and he thrust the letter into his pocket, and then kissed his wife with a kind of desperate remorse. He knew at last why Etta Alwyn had jilted him; and he knew also at the same moment that, feeling as he did towards her, he ought never to have married Olivine Sondes.

CHAPTER IV.

The Return.

Great was the astonishment expressed in mercantile circles when the failure of Alwyn and Allison, Colonial Brokers, was announced; but this astonishment proved as nothing in comparison to the dismay felt when it came to be understood the house had not merely stopped payment, but was rotten and bankrupt to the core.

Some few persons, indeed, had been doubtful of the firm's solvency for a considerable time previously, but

then in such cases a few persons always are wise before their time.

Let what will happen in the City — let this first-rate company collapse, that perfectly sound bank smash — let Blackbull prove unable to meet settling day serenely, or Hull, Manchester, and Co., fail to honour their acceptances, — straightway there arises a little regiment who were long ago aware of a tightness in money matters, of a screw being loose, of something amiss with the securities, of too much domestic extravagance, of an enormous number of bad debts.

When the storm breaks, when the evil begins to be talked of openly, it is really astonishing to find for how many a day previously very petty people had been whispering of the impending catastrophe.

A straw shows how the wind blows, and no matter how cautious a tottering firm or an insolvent individual may be, it is impossible to prevent some slight circumstance escaping which shall be a sign, to sharp eyes, of the beginning of the end.

It is the same with a man's credit as with a woman's frailty; long before the final crash comes in either case, watchful eyes have known how it would end, how dishonour or beggary was approaching. The matter has been discussed in very humble homes, mentioned among cronies, gossiped about over private cups of tea, canvassed between clerks seated in modest lodgings, intimated in those moments when tobacco is pressed down into pipes or the ash is knocked off cigars.

The lower strata of society, not the lowest by many degrees, but the lower strata composed of the small-salaried and highly-waged clerks of the community, are cognizant of everything concerning which in many

cases the upper classes would give almost any money to have timely information, and the lad who sits in your office or who posts your letters, or the clerk who "sirs" and "if you pleases" you, is aware of those little secrets which you imagine are known to yourself alone, and speculates at his leisure as to whether it is softening of the brain or impending ruin which is the matter, whether the end will be a private asylum or Basinghall Street.

Your anxieties, your debts, your troubles, your sins — veil these things as you will from the eyes of your friends, acquaintances, relatives, you cannot veil them from the butler standing behind your chair, from the clerk who is your most obedient servant for thirty shillings a week. They see the straws flying, and know what such flying portends; they watch you when the mask falls from your face, when you leave the pleasant circle, and close the door behind you, and stoop to pick up the burden of trouble which it is the orthodox thing to drop off your back before you enter into society, so that you may not bore man or woman with even a distant view of it. Eyes you think of no importance are on you when the smile fades away, and your mind is busy calculating chances; curious ears are open to hear your irritable complaints over small expenses, your off-hand regrets about this payment not having been made, that remittance not having arrived. If you remain behind to look over your books; if you are eager for letters; if you inquire with any undue anxiety whether Mr. So-and-so has called; if Mr. So-and-so's manner be at all cavalier; if you become suddenly cautious about leaving papers loose in your private office; if you are ever seen with your head

resting on your hand; if you push away your plate at dinner, or drink more wine than is your wont, or give a random answer denoting a wandering mind—straightway there is an official inquiry in office and servants' hall concerning your affairs; and more is pieced together out of these vague signs of the times than modern Divines have made, or are likely to make, out of the Emperor of the French, railways, and telegraphs, his Holiness the Pope, converts to Rome, Bishop Colenso, and all the mystical numbers in the prophet Daniel.

There is a judgment for employers even in this world, and the place where it is held is in neither the Old Bailey nor the Bankruptcy Court; but rather in tap-rooms, in dingy back parlours, in suburban tea-gardens, on Sundays beside the New River, or down at Gravesend or in any of those numerous places where clerks and confidential men go to take the air and compare notes concerning the solvency and respectability of their respective principals.

There petty juries are empanneled, and willing witnesses give evidence in the case; there Jenkins' establishment and Mrs. Jenkins' fortune are canvassed; there the extent of the transactions which take place between Simpkins and Jenkins are criticised. Whether names are lent; whether kites are flown; whether the governor could retire, or whether he won't cut up worth a penny; whether the concern is of brick or of straw; to what extent discounts are to be obtained; whether Master Harry is making the money spin, or Mr. John marrying an old woman for the sake of her couple of hundred thousand — these things are argued out and judgment is delivered on them while Paterfamilias is driving round the Park, and his sons

are recreating themselves at hunting-boxes in the country.

And so, when the final smash comes, when the evil morning dawns, when the "circular" is written and the books are placed in the hands of those accountants to whom such pickings belong as of right, Peters meeting Matthews in that little passage which runs from Lombard Street into King William Street, where the post-office is situated, or in Abchurch Yard, or coming out of some of the banks round Lothbury and Prince's Street, merely remarks —

"He has gone at last. Well, he fought hard to keep on his legs."

To which Matthews replies —

"Ay, but if he had fallen sooner he would not have brought so many down with him." Whereupon the pair shake their heads gravely, and Peters inquires whether Matthews won't take something, and the natural results follow.

The game is played out, the race run; but every turn of the one, every step of the other has been watched by curiously observant eyes, that were supposed to be bent on ledger and day-book, on letters and files. The upper ten thousand hear with an indignant surprise, with a terrible astonishment, that a great star has fallen from among them; that the mercantile palace has collapsed like a child's card-house; that the fairy bowers, the gold, the silver, the flowers, the splendid banquets, the men-servants and the maid-servants, have all vanished as a mist-wreath. They are amazed by the suddenness of the disappearance; they are angry at the deception which has, as they think, been kept up to delude them even to the last.

They say, "Why, it was only last week we dined there, only yesterday we saw Mrs. Mammon in the Park. How can such things be?" Yet for long and long previously, Matthews, living in a thirty-pound-a-year house at Dalston, or indulging in second-floor lodgings in some back street at the West End, knew that the merchant-prince was shaky, that his rest was broken, his mind ill at ease, that he would find it difficult to pull through; that Mrs. Mammon would not have her bays very long unless her settlements were very secure indeed; that Miss Mammon would never be presented at Court unless she made great haste to St. James's; that the young gentlemen would have, ere long, to lay down their thoroughbreds and cease draining the City till.

At first sight it may seem strange, when the lower stratum knows these things, that the information should not spread; but the *employé* never betrays his fellow's confidence to his employer. Amongst clerks, as amongst servants, *l'esprit de corps* constitutes a bond strong enough to ensure the safety of any secret Jones may impart to Smith, or Eliza Jane whisper into the sympathising ear of Matilda Anne.

It is the penalty people have to pay for civilisation — this utter want of domestic and social freedom; this dwelling continually in the midst of a great army which keeps its sentinels always on the alert; this sleeping, and eating, and walking, and waking, and driving, for ever surrounded by guards who are cognisant of every look; who take account of every word; who know the weaknesses, the sins, the anxieties, the hopes of their betters, as their betters never know the

weaknesses, sins, anxieties, hopes, fears, of the men and women who compose this modern inquisition.

There is not a morsel of bread greatness puts in its lips, not a glass of wine it swallows, not an article of attire wherewith it clothes itself, not a letter it receives, not a visitor it entertains, not a call it makes, not a soul it speaks to, that is not known to some one. There is no back-gate, there is no low garden-wall, no Sunday evening, no early morning gossip, no day out, for the mistress, as there is for the maid.

If John Thomas marries the cook and retires on his house property, and takes up his residence in Clematis Cottage, Holloway, he enjoys a social independence his former master never attained in Belgravia; if Matthews goes into the general commission or Manchester agency business, which he transacts in one office, where he is master, clerk, and errand-boy all in one, he is free from an espionage which never took its Argus eyes off the demeanour of his old employer. Friendly cooks discuss the niggardliness or extravagance of your weekly consumption of meat. Where you live — how you do your horses — whether on job or on your own account — how many you keep — how hard you work them, is all canvassed while Rogers waits to fetch you from your dinner-parties, or sits on the box in sober state outside the shop where your wife is buying your children's frocks, or the bank where your own balance is possibly not so large as you might deem desirable. And in like manner your clerks, knowing all about your affairs, tell what they suspect one to another; and before you clearly see the end, they have talked it over, and wonder how you will bear it, and what you will do.

It was so with Mr. Alwyn, at any rate. There was not a subordinate about his etablishment who felt surprised when the order came to close the place.

That it proved a grievous blow to many there can be no doubt, for trade chanced to be dull, and situations difficult to procure; but still, no one felt astonished. Other houses might be annoyed, if they liked; the principals might bluster and complain, and talk of "opposition," of having been deceived, of business having been carried on too long, if they chose — respective clerks decided it was all bosh, that any body with half an eye might have seen how things were going for himself.

"I could have told my people six months ago it was impossible for Mr. Alwyn to stand," said one, "but of course it is not my business to interfere."

"I heard last Christmas there was a tightness," remarked another.

"I remember being told at the time his daughter married that then he could hardly swim. He has kept his head above water pretty well for so long."

"Rascally shame that private sale of Mallingford," decided an accountant's clerk.

"Deep game — artful move," said the first speaker, admiringly; but still public opinion, as a rule, set strongly against both Mr. Alwyn and Mr. Gainswoode for this transaction. "Trading upon false pretences," "keeping up his credit by means of a sham estate," "flinging good money after bad," were the mildest phrases employed; accusations of robbing and swindling were brought against the unfortunate bankrupt, whose god had failed him just at the time when he stood most in need of the assistance of Mammon.

"We have long expected this," Mr. Perkins said to Percy Forbes, the "we" having reference to Mr. Sondes and himself, "though of course we said nothing of our suspicions."

"What induced you to think him embarrassed?" asked the other, who felt very sorry for his former employer, very sorry indeed.

"His wanting to take you into partnership," was the reply. "We felt confident there must be something wrong, something rotten —"

"In the state of Denmark," suggested Percy.

"No, rotten in the business, or else he would never have offered to take a young man who knew nothing whatever of trade, who had never stuck to his work, into the firm. I am quite plain you see, Mr. Forbes, and I hope you won't be offended at what I am saying," went on Mr. Perkins, apologetically: "if any one offered you a partnership now, I should not be surprised; but then it was different, — you were different."

"Rather," assented his listener.

"Well, it is a bad business," went on Mr. Perkins, "and I am glad you are well out of it, and Lawrence too. At one time I am sure I thought he would have married Miss Alwyn for certain, and, if he had, nothing could have saved his going down with the ship — nothing."

"Perhaps he might have kept the ship from going down at all," speculated Mr. Forbes, but the visitor shook his head doubtfully.

"Lawrence is better out of the mess," he said, "and Olivine will make him a fifty-times better wife than Miss Alwyn ever could make to any one. I hope

she will be good to her father now; he was a good father to her."

"He was a kind one, at all events," assented Mr. Forbes. "I think I shall go up to Hereford Street, and see the old gentleman. Many a pleasant hour I passed in his house. Well, it is hard, let Mr. Alwyn be what he will; I say, it does seem hard, and I for one am very sorry for his distress."

"Won't it be rather awkward?" inquired Mr. Perkins.

"Asking if I can be of any use?" answered Percy. "No, I think not; at least, it won't seem awkward to me — not half so awkward as staying away, and never saying a word to him. I wish Mr. Sondes were well enough to call, he might now be of some real service to Mr. Alwyn."

"What do you think is really the matter with Sondes?" demanded Mr. Perkins, suddenly.

"How should I know?" asked Percy; "something wrong with his liver, did not Reddy say?"

"Yes; but I don't believe Reddy knows much about the matter."

"Perhaps he will consult some one else when his daughter returns," answered Percy Forbes. "I have thought him looking very ill for a considerable time past."

"So have I," replied Mr. Perkins.

"Well, now he has taken Barbour into partnership, I hope he will take things easily, and give himself a chance of recovery," was the reply, and so the conversation dropped. But next day Percy Forbes called in Hereford Street, and asked whether he could see Mr. Alwyn.

"I will inquire, sir," said Mr. Alwyn's confidential servant, ushering Percy into the drawing-room and closing the door behind him.

How well Percy remembered that apartment as it appeared in Miss Etta's time: the flowers, the knick-nacks, the littered music, the tangle of berlin-wool: now the balcony was bare of shrub, or plant, or flower, the grand piano was closed, every book was laid out as if for burial, every chair occupied its proper place.

There was a terrible order reigning in the room, a fearful formality, an utter absence of comfort, which impressed Percy painfully. He had passed, as he said, many a pleasant day in the house in the time when Miss Alwyn queened it there; and he could not endure to witness the changes so short a period had sufficed to bring about.

From window to window Percy wandered. He looked out on the bustle of Oxford Street; he watched the cabs and carts, the omnibuses, and the carriages go by; and then he flung himself once again into a chair, and thought of the old time and of the new, of the great man fallen, of the woman who had found a shelter for herself before the storm burst.

He did not feel especially happy as he recalled these things; a man who has been twice disappointed, who, having loved two women, finds himself deserted by both, is not apt to find a retrospect of the years peculiarly pleasant.

In money matters he had prospered tolerably; but his home was very lonely, his life very cold. How would it be with him in the years to come? Should he ever again grow reconciled to his bachelor existence? ever learn to forget Olivine Sondes? ever be able to

think of her as he thought of Etta Alwyn, without regret, without repining? Could he ever cease longing for the sweet face, for the soft voice, for the light step, for the clasp of that dear hand? Well-a-day! was not his life like the room in which he sat? was not everything in it set out in its appointed place? was there not a frigid formality about the arrangement of his existence? was it not cold and chilly, and had not the fires burned down? were not the lights extinguished?

"Percy, this is very kind of you."

It was Mr. Alwyn who spoke; who came in, one of Mammon's elect no longer, but one of the meanest among Mammon's servants. His hair was much greyer than formerly; his figure not so erect. He had suffered awfully. Percy saw that at a glance, and his heart went out towards the man who had been so unfortunate.

"I came to see if I could be of any service; if I could do anything."

"No, thank you; no — no; but sit down and talk to me. This is a bad business, a very bad business, is it not?"

Percy assented to this statement; what else could he do? and Mr. Alwyn proceeded.

"I ought to have stopped long ago; but I went on, on, hoping to retrieve my position. It is not an easy thing, though, to prop up a tottering house; better to have let it go at once. If I had done so, I should not have been a beggar, as I am. There would have been something left at all events. One comfort there is, however, through all. Etta won't feel it — Etta is provided for."

"She will feel it for you, though," suggested Percy Forbes.

"Yes; but she has expected it for so long a time. She knew before her marriage — that is — you understand, Percy?"

"I understand, sir," Percy said; he could imagine the conversations that had been held between parent and child; he could comprehend how Etta had fought against her fate, and finally accepted it; he could fancy how hard things must have gone with her before she listened favourably to Mr. Gainswoode; how thoroughly the father must have explained his position to her before she could ever have agreed to sell herself for so poor a price. "Mrs. Gainswoode it still abroad, I suppose?" he went on, after a pause.

"No, she is at Mallingford," was the reply. "I am going to stay with her for a time; there is nothing I can do here at present. I do not know what I shall do yet. I do not know, I am sure."

And Mr. Alwyn bent forward in his old attitude, and studied the pattern of the carpet, while Percy said: —

"Is there no way in which I can help — in which I can be of assistance?"

"None," was the reply; "unless you will come sometimes and spend an hour or two with me in the evenings. It is so dull sitting in the house all alone, and I do not like to go out. How is Mr. Sondes? Now, there is a fortunate man. He has made money and saved it. He never lived up to his income. He never spent as I have spent. Take my advice, Percy," added Mr. Alwyn, with much earnestness, "and never try to do two things at the same time. If I had my

life to go over again I would stick to business, and leave fashionable follies alone. What good has this house ever done me? What enjoyment had I ever out of Mallingford? Would it not have been far happier for Etta had she been brought up, like Barbour's wife, without any extravagant notions? Well, I can never make a better of it now, I suppose; so there is no use fretting about the matter. No! you need not hold out any hopes of that kind. I can never raise my head in the City again; though, God knows, I have acted for the best all through."

Thus he ran on, talking about his bankruptcy, about his partner, about the cause of the final smash, about Lawrence and Etta, about Mr. Sondes and Olivine, till Percy took his departure.

"It was very kind of you," said Mr. Alwyn, gratefully, "very;" and he added his customary blessing in such a forlorn piteous kind of way, that Percy Forbes could see nothing ludicrous in the formula, but left the house, feeling more sorry for Mr. Alwyn's reverses than he should have thought at one time possible. As he turned into Oxford Street, the first person he came in contact with was Lawrence Barbour — Lawrence looking all the better for his holiday.

"Why, where have you come from?" asked Percy, in surprise.

"France," was the reply. "We returned this morning. I am just going to call on Mr. Alwyn. I suppose he is awfully cut up."

"Yes. He will be very glad to see you. Seems to appreciate small kindnesses wonderfully. And talking of that, how kind it is of you to pay almost your first visit to him."

"I! Oh! that is nothing!" exclaimed Lawrence. "I could not settle to business exactly the same day I came back; and so, as I had nothing to do, I thought I would run up and see him. Mr. Sondes is a little better," and Lawrence made a movement of departure.

"How is Mrs. Barbour?" Percy detained him to ask.

"She is very well indeed, thank you; a little tired after her journey; a little anxious about her uncle; and so on. Come round and see us, will you? That is right. Good-day," and Lawrence was off.

"Well, it does seem hard," soliloquised Percy Forbes, "that he should have got her, and I should not; for I am greatly mistaken if he is still not fonder of Etta than of Olivine — fonder, a hundred times."

And thinking these thoughts, he went back to his house beside the river, wondering whether he should be able to meet Olivine day after day and crush the old love out; whether he could ever come to regard her as Lawrence's wife, and not as something which had been stolen from himself.

"Suppose I had gone in and tried my chance," he reflected. "But, pooh! what chance had I? Am not I destined to live and die a bachelor? I will put that folly aside, and try to be of use to the child still."

The same evening he went round to Stepney Causeway to inquire after Mr. Sondes, and found uncle and niece seated together in the drawing-room, his head pillowed on her shoulder.

Very cordially Olivine greeted him: with a grave sad face she thanked him for his kindness and attention to her uncle while she was away.

"Only I think you ought to have told me sooner. Why did you not write to me direct?" and she looked at him a little reproachfully, while the tears gathered in her eyes.

"Mr. Sondes did not wish you to be told at all," Percy answered; whereupon she stooped and kissed her uncle, scolding him all the while, and declaring she would never leave him again — never — not to see the grandest sights or the loveliest countries.

After a time she grew more cheerful, however, and talked much of where they had been and what they had seen; told the little incidents of their short travel, and in her soft low voice related every particular of their journey.

Percy stayed for tea, and the candles were brought in; but still Lawrence never made his appearance.

"I wonder where he can be," Olivine at last observed. "He told us not to wait dinner for him; but I thought he would have been home before this."

"He said he was going up west," remarked Mr. Sondes; but Percy held his peace. He could not have told why he said nothing about his meeting with Lawrence, but he did say nothing for all that.

When he rose to go, Olivine accompanied him down the staircase, and opening the library-door, begged him to speak with her for a moment.

"What is the matter with uncle, Mr. Forbes?" she said. There was no candle in the room; but as she stood in the twilight, Percy could see that she was paler than usual, pale and trembling.

"Nothing serious, I hope," he answered.

"But you know — I am sure you know," she persisted.

"My dear —— Mrs. Barbour, I am no doctor," he answered; "and I can but repeat what I said at first, that I hope there is nothing serious the matter — nothing but what your presence and your nursing may soon put to rights."

"You think that really ——"

"I do." Percy felt it very hard to tell her the falsehood, but still he did tell it; and having done so, of course he had to stick to his story.

"You would not deceive me?" she suggested; and she laid her hand on his arm entreatingly.

"No, I would not. I think your uncle is far from well, but still with care I see no reason to doubt his being spared to you for many a year to come."

"Thank you," she said, simply; and she put her hand in his.

For the moment Percy turned coward. He knew he had spoken falsely in the spirit, though not in the letter; he knew he was keeping back the fact that Mr. Sondes' disease must prove fatal sooner or later; but yet in this matter he was acting under Mr. Sondes' direction, so it was scarcely that which made him feel all his good resolutions fading away, all his strength ebbing out from him.

Still and soft and warm lay the little hand in his; in the gathering gloom she stood quiet, her light dress floating round her like a sort of glory; he could see her eyes raised to his, wonderingly; he felt for the moment as if he were going mad to think she was lost to him for ever; he felt he must tell her, that he could not let her hand go till she knew what he had suffered; and then it was all over — he was a man again, strong to fight and to endure, strong to spare and

protect her from all evil, strong to bear his anguish in silence and to make no sign, strong to drop her hand and bid her good-by, and cross the hall, and pass out of the door into the night.

For a long time after he returned home he paced up and down his garden-walks — more especially that walk which runs parallel with the Thames.

There were lights on the shore, lights on the vessels lying in the river; and every now and then Percy paused in his walk, and looked up and down the river with a terrible despair.

He had not felt it one-half so much when she was married; when he saw her pass down the aisle at St. Dunstan's, she had not seemed so completely lost to him as she did now.

He said to his own heart he could not endure it one minute, and then he cursed himself in his anger for a poor fool the next; he said he could not go on meeting her, talking to her, visiting her, and still bear in silence; and then he turned upon this weaker self, and forced it to be strong.

When even in inanimate nature we see something very pure and very white, we dread soiling it even by a touch; and it was some feeling of this kind, only intensified, Percy Forbes experienced as he walked beside the Thames, forming the resolutions of his future life.

She was so pure, so spotless, so perfectly trustful and innocent, that the man felt he would have knelt and kissed the very hem of her garment, if he could only recall the few moments during which he had kept her hand in his while he battled with his anguish.

He would not have had even repentant tears fall on her. He would have tried, had God given her to him, to keep her from the knowledge of all sorrow and of all sin; and he vowed, while the cool early night-air fanned his temples, that he would crush out a love which could never be anything now save a pain and an offence; that he would conquer his passion; that he would resign himself to his fate, and meeting her constantly, never show by word, or look, or sign, the sorrow she had caused him.

That he was laying out a task which it might prove beyond his strength to accomplish, did not occur to Percy Forbes; that, as time went by, Olivine might appeal to him for help and comfort he could not anticipate; that he should one day have to fight out a harder fight than any he had ever waged, he would not then have believed, had an angel assured him of the fact.

These things were lying before him in the future; but the man never saw them as he walked in the stillness, through the darkness, up and down the path overlooking the river!

CHAPTER V.

Mrs. Gainswoode.

While Percy Forbes was forming all manner of good resolutions — laying out for himself the plan of his future life, wherein should be found no fault — through the night, Lawrence Barbour was walking home, weary and discontented.

He was tired, and yet still he walked; for he was

not more weary physically than mentally; and he felt as though the night-breeze, the long straight streets, the people he was sure to encounter in those streets, the lights, the noise, the mere bodily fatigue of traversing the never-ending pavements, might do him good, might enable him to collect his scattered senses, and face *his* future before re-entering his home.

There is nothing perhaps so terrible to a man as the feeling that he has matrimonially made a mistake, that he has deluded himself, that the woman he has taken for better, for worse, can never be the wife of his dream-fancy to him.

Let her be good as a saint, pure as an angel, beautiful as a houri, accomplished, graceful, learned — she may never supply the place of that bright image; never be as the first love of his youth to the man, who, having once seen the ideal of his imagination realised, has yet been disappointed in the little matter of making that ideal his wife.

Everything else in life can be remedied — save this. The years are before him, and may be full of gold, rank, fame; the mines of existence are still untouched for him to dig what he will, out of; there is wealth for the winning, fame for the striving, land for the buying, distinction for the working; there are fallow-fields for him to turn up, and, in the furrows his own plough has made, he may sow seed which shall bring forth abundantly; there are pictures for him to paint, melodies for him to compose, poems for him to pen, books for him to write; there are treasures for him to bring from foreign lands; there is timber growing, wherewith he may yet build vessels to send

across the seas; there are mysteries for him to fathom, problems for him to solve.

If he make a mistake in one thing, he can rectify it by doing right about another; if one mine be unproductive, or one field barren, he can try for gold in some fresh direction; it is competent for him to turn up the sods of distant acres, and plant and reap there; — but to find one has chosen wrongly in marriage, is as when a man discovers, just as his sun is close upon setting, that he has erred through life: there is no retracing either road; there is no getting rid either of the spent existence, or of the lawful wife; the day is gone; the die cast; the decision made, beyond recall; and God help the created being who finds, as Lawrence Barbour found, that he has taken the wrong turning, and commenced traversing a hateful path which he must pursue among briars and brambles, over sharp stones and hard flints, through a land destitute of flower or fruit, of leaf or bud, to the end! God help His creature, then! I say; because the one star, Hope, which makes existence endurable, must have dropped at that moment out of heaven, leaving nothing to light the feeble, faltering steps onward through life, save the dim lamp, Endurance.

What if the man have erred? what if it be but his fitting wages he is receiving? does the fact of disease make the bitter draught any the more palatable? does the admitted cancer render the pain of the surgeon's knife any the less keen when it cuts its way down, down into the shrinking flesh? Did the knowledge that he had no one but himself to thank for his sorrow and his bondage make Lawrence's lot seem any less undesirable to him as he walked home along those

never-ending streets, cursing his folly and his weakness as he strode on?

He was a selfish and an ambitious man. First and last he had thought of nothing save his own aims, objects, wishes; he had sacrificed no desire, he had pitied no victim; foiled at one leap, he had, as he thought, taken the next best point in the field, without considering any living being except himself; but that only made the onward course seem all the harder; its unvarying monotony, its unavailing regrets, the more difficult to bear.

To a man of his nature there was a something awful in the knowledge that to struggle against the destiny he had voluntarily chosen, could effect no good purpose, could but make his position worse. He felt then as he had felt in St. George's, when he lay there bruised and maimed, and battered, viz., that any fight would have been preferable to endurance; any mortal disease better than the useless recovery to feeble health, for life.

Pity him, friends, striding over the pavements, passing under the lamps, looking at groups of men and of women hurrying along, without seeing a face, without hearing a sound. Pity him, as the traffic roars through the streets, as he leaves the West behind and nears the City — as he treads, for any want of inclination to return home by the shortest route, the thoroughfares where you first beheld him — and recals hazily, and like one who thinks between sleeping and waking, his early impressions of London, and the dreams wherewith he entered it.

Then those City streets were full of life and movement, of business and bartering; now the shops are

closed; in lieu of oranges and shaddocks, of lemons and oysters, of bloaters and cod-fish, there are painted shutters and iron bars. The silence of the summer-night has fallen on the familiar places. Thames Street is almost deserted, and he meets no man or woman as he makes his way round the Lantern Church, and so into Tower Hill.

At no stage of his story probably was he the lad or man you would have selected for son, or lover, or friend; but still, each human being, let him be what he will, has been sent into the world with capacities for suffering or for pleasure, and for this reason, if for no other, humanity has sympathy for its fellow in grief and in joy.

And Lawrence Barbour was suffering then. As a sleeping man will dream that he is in pain, and wake to find the grasp of some horrible agony on him, so he had, in a kind of mental sleep, dreamed that his marriage was a mistake, his love for his wife a delusion, and then awakened, to find that his slumbers had been true prophets, that he loved but one woman, whom after two years he met again.

Etta Alwyn: her image walked before him while he paced those weary streets. It was that fate he had come to London so many a year before to meet. Seeing her at Mallingford, he still escaped her toils; and yet, behold! out of the millions, she was the woman he chose.

He had avoided her for long; and here, with his honeymoon scarce over, they were thrown into contact once again. While he sat with Mr. Alwyn in the accustomed room, with every chair and table, every book and screen and vase, reminding him of his faithless

love, she arrived from Mallingford, and entered the apartment, and greeted him.

"So kind," she said, pressing his hand, "thoughtful, and friendly as ever;" and then she swept to her seat, and through the hours they talked together, while Mr. Alwyn occupied his accustomed seat.

She had not aged; she had not faded; she had not changed, unless it might be that there was more dignity in her carriage; more self-possession in her address. A woman who had but to beckon, and the old love, however shy, however resolved, fluttered back; who had but to smile in order to make the newly-married man forget her ties and his own — the vows which bound her, and the obligations that lay upon him.

Till he was outside the door; and then he looked at the gold his memory held, and found it dross; at the gems his hands clasped, and discovered they were but as very worthless stones. What honour or what pleasure, what good or what honesty, could there be in such companionship for the future? Rather what misery, what grief, what sin, what falsehood, what struggle, if he were not strong enough to flee from the temptation to come?

When he turned the corner of Hereford Street it appeared to the man's fancy that a woman was waiting for him there; a woman clad all in white, faint, shadowy, and vague, who stole as it seemed from the walls, and took him sorrowfully by the hand, and led him with beseeching eyes away.

Through the years, Lawrence never quite lost that impression; after the seasons had come and gone, he still found the fancy remaining with him; let him go far wrong as he would, the touch of those impalpable

fingers, the persuasive grasp of that phantom hand, were among the restraining influences of his life. Though Etta Alwyn's face haunted him; though she seemed to precede his steps and beckon him to follow, still there was a presence nearer still, a haunting presence which, running swiftly, kept pace with his pace; which would not be shaken off, which kept ever looking at him with wistful and sorrowing eyes, which never appeared angry, but always sad; the face of which was like unto the face of his better angel — of his wife Olivine.

The farther he got from Hereford Street the more distinctly he beheld that vision; till at last, looking at it, his soul became filled with a terrible pity — with a sickening despair: pity for the trouble written on the countenance; despair for the part he had taken in tracing that trouble there. "Poor child, poor Olivine!" he thought; and Olivine, unconscious of the phantom which had kept him company through the noisy West-End thoroughfares, along the silent City streets, wondered what made her husband at once so tender and so sad, so loving and so thoughtful, while he held her to his breast and kissed her over and over again.

"I thought you were never coming back," she said, knotting up his chain as she spoke.

"I was detained, love," he answered; and she felt satisfied.

"What an idiot I was," Lawrence, looking down upon the sweet, pure face, decided; "what a blind, besotted idiot, to feel as I have done to-night;" and once again he drew his wife towards him, and once again he kissed her, while Olivine, nestling beside him, marvelled more and more.

As for Mrs. Gainswoode, when she went up, after

Lawrence departed, to the room which had been hers before she married, the strongest impression on her mind was, that all lives in general were mistakes, and that her life in particular was a peculiar mistake.

"Why had not the man money?" she thought; and she dismissed her maid, and, lying back in her chair and looking up at the ornamented ceiling, argued this question out at her leisure.

Why had not the man money? Why could she not have married him instead of that other? Why had she been forced to sell herself: and for so poor a price also? "I have got very little by it," she reflected. "Papa, I think, had the best of that bargain; but, after all, it has turned out a mistake. What do I get from it? food, clothing, shelter, and a certain position. What has been his share? bankruptcy averted for a time; and decidedly, yes, decidedly, if bankruptcy had come without Mr. Gainswoode, it would have been an awful thing for us. And so, sir, for thus much I am grateful to you and to Providence;" and Etta leaned back a little farther in her chair, and considered that matter more fully.

To a given point the game had been satisfactory — beyond that it proved she found a loss. To her it had not been worth the candle. There was nothing she greatly desired she possessed; nothing she had set out in life to win, could she call hers.

When she married an old man, she imagined she should be able figuratively to drive him with a silken thread; that her whim would be his law; the fulfilment of her caprices his delight; that she should be able to spend and to flirt, to entertain, to visit, to receive, at her own sweet will and pleasure.

Mr. Gainswoode, however, speedily undeceived her on these points. He might be old, but he was not in his dotage; he might be very fond of Etta, but he was very fond of himself likewise.

He was a collector of old pictures, of rare books, of curious cabinets; but these articles by no means absorbed his attention to such an extent as to cause him to neglect his wife. When other wives bemoaned their husbands' absorption in business, or literature, or science, or politics, Etta was wont to murmur to herself, and wish that Mr. Gainswoode could be induced to follow other men's lead and neglect her, as Mr. This, and That, and so forth, neglected their aggrieved better halves.

"They are all alike," was Etta's opinion. "If you do not want them to be after you, they are; and if you wish to have them with you, they think two or three hundred miles scarcely sufficient distance to keep them and you apart. Heigh ho! ah, well! how sick I am of marriage and of slavery."

And it was slavery: every old habit, every caprice, every dream Etta had to lay aside when she became Mrs. Gainswoode. No old man's darling was she; but the wife of a somewhat exacting individual, who liked order and regularity; who affected stately society, who would have no pleasant gatherings of young men and young women, of marriageable bachelors and pretty maidens, disturbing the regularity of his establishment.

Playing the hostess at dreary dinner-parties, being agreeable during the progress of dreadfully tiring evenings, not rebelling against the tread-mill-work of making calls and receiving visitors, being duly punctual at stated interviews with the housekeeper — these things

comprised, in Mr. Gainswoode's opinion, the whole duty of woman.

And yet, not quite all. If a lady in his wife's rank, mistress of Mallingford, had, in a proper, decorous kind of way, brought two or three children into the world, Mr. Gainswoode would have considered she was performing her mission.

Broods of babies, urchins swarming in and out of labourers' cottages, large families among the industrial classes or poor professional people, Mr. Gainswoode considered decidedly immoral, and calculated in time to undermine the British constitution, to trouble political economists, to pauperise the country, and to produce, in fact, too many evil results for mention to be made of the one-half of them.

On the other hand, however, the want of heirs, or of an heir, at all events, where there was an estate and a good income to keep up that estate, could not be considered the correct thing, and was a proceeding likely to cause eventually inconvenience and annoyance; and for these reasons, and also, perhaps, because his wife did not quite fill up the void in his life, Mr. Gainswoode longed for a son, to whom he could leave Mallingford, for whose benefit he might collect rarer pictures, and more eccentric knick-knacks than ever.

When he went abroad, it was to buy the works of the old masters; when he stayed at home, his delight was to superintend the opening of packing-cases, the hanging of his favourite purchases.

Round the rooms visitors were duly escorted, and even Etta was expected to exhibit the treasures, and to act as showman occasionally.

It was a life she loathed; and yet she did not dare

to express dissatisfaction or even *ennui*. She detested the effect of light and shadow; she anathematised in her heart every man who had ever made himself busy with brush and palette; she decided that county society was worse than no society at all; that going out to stupid dinner-parties and to formal evening penances, miscalled entertainments, was a fearful and wonderful way of spending a life; and she longed, with a longing unutterable, for the old free existence, for the unbounded liberty, for the pleasant variety, for the gay society of her girlhood.

That society was Mr. Gainswoode's bugbear; a party, such as the one at Reach House, filled his soul with a terror, and an abhorrence too deep for words. Dancing he did not approve of; laughter was undignified; any existence, save one — ruled off, so to speak, into portions, and accurately divided and subdivided into reading, driving, visiting, lunching, dining, entertaining, going to church, and travelling with maid and dressing-case — seemed to him misspent and sinful. To that seventh heaven of human bliss, county society, he had not attained without a certain struggle, and Mr. Gainswoode was resolute that, by no act of his or of his wife, should so enviable a position be jeopardised.

As for Etta, she hated it all; hated the women, with their magnificent dresses, with their grand old lace, with their diamonds and amethysts, their frigid propriety, their dignified exclusiveness. She had never cared for her own sex; and, behold, here was an army, who gave back scorn for scorn — who could not away with her ideas, who silently criticised her manners with wondering eyes and uplifted eyebrows — who received her on sufferance — who made "allowances" for the

disadvantages of her birth and education — who were so highly ground and polished, that they resembled glittering steel — who had their small, mild, ladylike pieces of wit — who were unexceptionably proper — who had never, from childhood, committed themselves — who always said precisely the right thing at the right time — who were not cordial, nor yet uncivil — who, whether she saw them in their own homes, or in the drawing-room at Mallingford — spoke to them in the church porch, or made one of them at ball, or concert, or dinner-party — were still the same; always polite, always icy, always conventional, always standing within a social ring-fence, over which they condescended to address this woman, of whose pedigree, of whose opinions, of whose appearance, of whose hair it was impossible for them altogether to approve.

Many a time Etta clenched her hands and stamped her foot in impotent rage at their silent superiority, at their scorn, which was a thing rather to be felt than noticed — to be stored up than commented on. She had once longed to be free of this very class; now she would only too gladly have flung them all overboard.

"It is because we ape their ways, because we are cowards, and do not dare to take our own way, that they treat us as if we belonged to an inferior order of creation," she thought. "If I could induce Mr. Gainswoode to get rid of all this rubbish — to burn his old masters, and send his ridiculous cabinets and chests and chairs back to the men who made them, to throw open the house and ask some Christians made of flesh and blood, instead of ice and propriety, inside our doors, — if he would make Mallingford pleasant to any body, and not let us go on as though we were living in a

fashionable reformatory, these people would regard us not as very poor imitations of themselves, but as individuals possessed not merely of independent means, but also of independent opinions.

"I am confident their way is none so pleasant or amusing that we ought to wear ourselves out trying to follow their lead; and with the money spent in art and curiosities we might afford to set the fashion, and win the eternal gratitude of mankind by making country life agreeable, county society interesting."

Thus Etta argued; but she found, as time went on, that it was useless for her to kick against the pricks. At first she ventured to say the pictures were gloomy, that the enormous number hung on the walls and filling the corridors darkened the house, and gave it a sombre and dreary aspect; but before long, Etta learned better, and discoursed as glibly about the old masters as though she had known each man "among the horrors" (that was her way of mentally referring to them) personally.

At first, likewise, she expressed herself sceptically concerning straight-backed and wretchedly uncomfortable chairs, concerning carved cabinets, and inlaid tables, and wonderful chests; she had beheld shops, where so fast as one article of ancient furniture was disposed of another took its place to trap the unwary, to be a snare and a delusion to connoisseurs. Never an atom did Mrs. Gainswoode believe in Wardour Street antiquities, "all made in back lanes, and giving a considerable amount of occupation," she remarked once, greatly to her husband's horror, who was at much pains to explain how this carving, must have been executed in the Middle Ages; how the shape of that vase was a lost

art; how these hideous shepherds and shepherdesses had descended from palace to curiosity-shop; how, when her taste came to be educated, she would understand wherein genuine antiquities differed from spurious imitations, and "meantime, my love," he entreated, "pray do not expose your ignorance, nor talk as you do about modern manufactories of ancient furniture, because no one except the very newly rich are ever imposed on by counterfeits."

Had Etta been an heiress, as the world generally fancied she was; had her father really owned an acre of Mallingford; had her fortune been certain, as Mr. Gainswoode — who believed in business as he believed in his black pictures, his marbles, his china, and himself — fondly imagined, the new owner of Mallingford might have found moulding his wife a difficult and by no means an agreeable task; but as matters stood, Mrs. Gainswoode knew on which side her portion of bread was buttered, and soon learned not to give offence; to humour her husband's peculiarities; to affect his tastes; to defer to his opinions.

How weary, however, she was of all these, and of him into the bargain, who could ever hope to tell? How she detested her harness, how she chafed in secret at the bit and curb; how the collar exasperated her, were things she scarcely liked to think about even when alone.

Her life was passing away, and she had no pleasure in it. She could not even make merry at the expense of her acquaintances, because she had no one friend or relative or crony to make merry with. Every man and woman she met considered high life a sort of temporal heaven, and the Upper Ten Thousand the

angels thereof. Londoners, even, who came down occasionally into banishment, and duly attended church, and religiously kept awake through the afternoon service, merely remarked they thought the country dull, and preferred town. That it was the people who resided in the country which made it dull, never seemed to occur to them.

Except Lord Lallard, there was not a soul within miles of Mallingford "fit for a Christian to speak to," was a fact Etta confided to her father; and somehow Lord Lallard did not much like Mrs. Gainswoode, and refrained from offering the hospitalities of Lallard Park very freely to her husband.

How Etta delighted when any of the great people slipped and fell; when nature proved stronger than art; when flesh and blood made its way through the social ice, and shocked society with the spectacle of Mrs. Straitlace's daughter running off with her brother's tutor; or young Lord Vere de Vere marrying his mother's waiting-maid!

Though she said "How shocking!" though she wondered how poor dear Mrs. Straitlace could bear up against the calamity as she did; though she applauded Mr. Straitlace's intention of cutting his daughter off with a shilling; though she agreed the new Lady Vere de Vere ought to be tabooed; though she joined the hue and cry, and hunted the unfortunate delinquents down as well as any one, — still there was a glitter in her eye and a tone in her voice which she could not repress, that caused perfect good breeding and propriety to distrust her, and doubt whether, after all, she did not feel more glad than sorry to see the escutcheon sullied, the family pride lying humbled in the dust.

Of what use was cleverness to her among such a set of respectabilities? Socially, the people with whom she came in contact disliked cleverness. It was all very well in books, very well in statesmen and barristers, and men whose profession it was to know much and to talk more; but for other persons — persons who belonged to the Upper Ten, or who aspired to belong to that class — a perfect knowledge of the world as the world appeared to the select few, utter repose of manner, sublime indifference to everything, a stately and quiet walk through life, were gifts to be cultivated, rather than the power of conversing fluently, of airing any fresh opinions — any heretical ideas.

"If I had only married a man like Lawrence," she thought — not once or twice, but day after day, as she pursued the wearisome tenour of her unexciting life, — "how different my fate would have been!" And often she sighed to think how much happier she could have made herself living even due East with him than amongst the trees at Mallingford.

"Better bread and water and freedom," she decided; "better hips and haws in the woods than sugar and biscuit inside gilded wires." And the tears rose to Etta's eyes, and prevented her seeing the ornamented ceiling, while she thought how Lawrence was lost to her for ever — how by her own act she had given him away to that chit — to that baby — to that Olivine.

"And yet I could not help it," finished the woman. "He had no money. Why had he none? why had he not Mallingford? why are all the pleasant men, the companionable men, poor as church mice? why does

wealth run to disagreeable old horrors as steel to a magnet? Every nice man I have ever seen in my life was either poor or married, and yet the clergy expect us to believe in a beneficent Providence — in a Power which regulates these things. I wonder what his wife will say to Master Lawrence's defection. I wonder if he will tell her he has seen *me*, and if she will be jealous. I wonder if Mr. Gainswoode would feel satisfied did he know of a young man sitting for five hours listening, entranced, while Mrs. Gainswoode cut up great people, and spoke evil of the powers that be. How delicious it is to be able to open one's mind to some one after a couple of years of the silent system. How pleasant to descend from a pedestal, and feel one is not a statue, but a human being. I wish I had been born a housemaid. How nice it must be to talk to one's young man round the corner, and make signs to him from upper windows and across the streets. What an amount of amusement those kind of people must get out of us; and yet, possibly, my maid thinks it would suit her views exactly to be a lady; and our footmen envy their masters the fact of destiny having sentenced them to penal servitude for life. Society will put me on a shorter allowance of civility than ever, I suppose, now that it knows Mallingford does not belong to my father. Business paupers! what a charming idea. Certainly my husband has behaved magnificently in the matter. If the proprieties only behave one-half so well, I shall forgive them many a slight. To be sure, the hope of an heir may have softened Mr. Gainswoode's heart. Now that is a dispensation of Providence — the certain failure and the possible son coming at the same time — the

bane and the antidote appearing in sight together — the nettle and the docken growing side by side."

And so Etta Gainswoode mentally talked over her position; and the hours went by, and the candles burnt low on her dressing-table, and the noise of passing cabs, of lumbering vans, grew less and less continuous, and the room grew lonesome, dark, and chilly; and at last the woman, with a shiver, rose, and, after slowly undressing herself, went to bed, and laying her aching head on the pillow, and closing her tired eyes, tried with all her might to go to sleep.

The inability to sleep had latterly been one of her greatest troubles.

"If ever I take to praying," thought Mrs. Gainswoode, "it will be for one sound sleep more before I die;" and almost involuntarily the woman, who was as godless as she was worldly, muttered a petition for rest, for repose of body, for peace of mind.

CHAPTER VI.

The Two Wives.

Mrs. Gainswoode remained in town for nearly a fortnight, and during that time managed to make her way due East, in order to call on Olivine, whom, greatly to her disgust, she found "not at home."

"It is intolerably provoking," she said. "I must leave London to-morrow, and I wanted so much to see her," and Etta's thick silk dress rustled as she spoke, and the hall was filled with the perfume that seemed to pervade every plait and fold of her attire — every ribbon and scrap of lace she wore.

"Perhaps she may soon return; can I wait for her?" she went on. "I take it for granted she is really out, and not engaged?" This was interrogative.

"Yes, ma'am," answered the servant. "She and Mr. Sondes have gone over to Mr. Forbes'."

"You dear, good, stupid old soul. Why could you not have said that at first?" exclaimed Etta. "I will drive on to Reach House if you think I am certain to find her there."

"You are certain to find her, ma'am. Master likes to sit looking out on the river; and Miss Olivine — Mrs. Barbour, I mean — takes her work and stays with him."

"They go to Mr. Forbes' then every day, I suppose?" suggested Etta, pausing on the door step, and turning a little round to ask the question.

"Pretty well, ma'am. Master fancies the air down by the river is fresher than this," and Mary closed the brougham door upon Mrs. Gainswoode, who was by this time seated in her carriage.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Etta to herself as she drove along the Commercial Road towards the West India Docks; "and these people are considered sane, and consider themselves so. How charming it must be to live even due East with such perfectly unsophisticated individuals. The garden of Eden was nothing to this!" and Mrs. Gainswoode put her feet on the opposite cushion and leaned back, while she thought with a vague wonder of Mr. Sondes' madness and Lawrence's folly.

"Why the man won't come to see *me;* and yet he is such an idiot as to let his wife spend half her time

mooning over crotchet and Longfellow's poems in Percy's paradise. And I am certain Percy was in love with her, over head and ears."

From which speech it will be perceived that Lawrence had adhered to his good intentions, and kept away from that pleasant but dangerous shore, where in the moonlight the waves came rippling in on the sands and the mermaids sang their songs sweetly.

For the rest, when Etta drove through the gates that are now so seldom opened; when she alighted from her carriage and walked across the grass towards the path overlooking the river which has been so often mentioned in this story; she found not only Mr. Sondes and Olivine, but Percy Forbes and Lawrence Barbour all grouped together.

"Percy, do not flatter yourself my visit is to you," said Mrs. Gainswoode, after she had shaken hands all round, addressing herself to Mr. Forbes, and making him a little mocking curtsey as she spoke. "It is to this fair lady, who seems as difficult to catch as a *leprachaun* or a will-o'-the-wisp. I heard at Stepney Causeway you were here — heard, that is, by dint of questioning and lamentation — and so I came on in faith. Seriously, though, I have wished so much to see you," she added, turning to Olivine. "It strikes me your husband is not taking proper care of you, child; you look pale, and you look weary."

Lawrence was standing close beside Olivine at the moment, and his wife put her hand confidingly in his, while she answered,

"No one can say that of you at any rate, Mrs. Gainswoode, for I never saw you look better."

"Country air, my dear. You must come and try

whether it would not blow some colour even into your cheeks. If you and your uncle were to spend a month with us at Mallingford, it would do you both a world of good. What do you say, Mr. Barbour? Will you spare your wife to me for a few weeks? Mr. Gainswoode would be so delighted. If I were at all of a jealous disposition, in fact —"

"I should recommend Mrs. Barbour not to try whether you are or not," remarked Percy Forbes, filling up Etta's blank.

"Ah! she has more sense than to follow your advice in any thing," retorted Mrs. Gainswoode. "What a delicious spot this is, Percy; what a sin it is for you to be living here all alone. I declare if I were not married, I should really feel almost inclined to take pity on you myself."

"Take pity on me now, and do not tantalise a poor wretch with the mention of a happiness he may never hope to taste."

"You are not in the least changed, I see," observed Etta. She was seated by this time, and addressed her remarks to Percy, who stood near her, from under cover of a most dainty parasol, with which she shaded her eyes from the glare of the afternoon sun.

"Nor improved, I fear," he said, in reply; "but, such as I am, I remain as ever your devoted, obedient, and admiring servant."

"Mr. Forbes, allow me to express my obligations for that pretty speech," and she rose and made him another curtsey.

"And as for my poor house," went on Percy, "if you will kindly overlook that serious disadvantage of

the future Mrs. Forbes' unavoidable absence, and graciously condescend to make allowances for the wretchedness of a bachelor's establishment, I should feel honoured by your permitting me to have the pleasure of taking you into dinner."

"Good gracious! What time do you dine in this part of the world?" asked Etta, with a little affectation of horror.

"As a rule, madam, I am primitive enough to partake of my frugal meal at twelve o'clock; but to-day, in honour of my friends," and Percy made an inclination towards Mr. Sondes, Olivine, and her husband, "I deferred my usual mid-day repast for five hours."

"Well, it is a strange life," said Etta, reflectively.

"Do you mean my life, or lives in general?" he inquired.

"Both," she answered. "In particular, this seems to be a strange life for you to be leading. Had any person told me, in years gone by, Percy Forbes would ever turn 'worker,' I should have laughed the idea to scorn."

"You see the age of miracles is not past," interposed Lawrence.

"So it seems," she replied, a little significantly, and her eyes swept the quartette before her in a glance which did not escape Percy Forbes' notice.

"Can your ladyship eat before eight o'clock?" he asked.

"My ladyship will try," answered Etta. "I have never been inside your house, Percy, since the night of your ball," she went on. "Ah! what a charming ball that was. We were all single then, and now you alone are free. It is not quite fair, Mr. Sondes,

is it? He ought to be got into the cage somehow. Do you not know any pretty bird who would consent to enter into captivity with him?" and Mrs. Gainswoode turned to Olivine for a reply.

"There are no pretty birds in the Isle of Dogs, I am afraid," said Olivine, laughing; "at least, none pretty enough to satisfy Mr. Forbes. And it is such a pity; for, pleasant as the Reach House is now, it would be twice as pleasant if it had a mistress."

"Mr. Sondes, I appeal to you for deliverance from the wiles of matchmakers," cried Percy. "Mrs. Gainswoode, I am going to tell your coachman to put up his horse."

"I will tell him if you like," said Lawrence, and before the host could prevent his intention, he was off, and appeared no more until they were all assembled in the drawing-room before dinner.

"Now I do hope," Mrs. Gainswoode was entreating, as he entered, "I do hope, Mr. Sondes, you will come down very soon to Mallingford; only think, you have never seen it yet! You shall rise when you like, go to bed when you like, walk where you like, see whom you like. I am quite serious in thinking the thorough change and perfect quiet would contribute more towards re-establishing your health than all the doctors in London. Olivine knows what a charming place it is. Now, Olivine, like a sweet little thing as you are, persuade your uncle to come to us. Don't look at your husband, look at me. Mr. Barbour can run down from Saturday till Monday in every week, if he is too much engaged in making his fortune to give us more of his society."

"I think —" began Olivine, but at that moment

dinner was announced, and with a mental thanksgiving, Percy Forbes rose, and offered his arm to Mrs. Gainswoode.

"For shame," she said, with a pretty grimace, shaking a couple of fingers at him. "What are you thinking of! How can you dream of leaving a man and his wife together. Take in Mrs. Barbour. I am going to devote myself to Mr. Sondes."

Which she did to such good purpose that before dinner was half over, she had extorted a promise from that gentleman to visit Mallingford End.

"Resistless as ever," murmured Percy Forbes, holding the door open for her to pass out, "and as merciless," he added, in a still lower key.

For an instant Etta hesitated, meditating apparently some retort, but then she passed on, bowing her head the while, as though in acknowledgment of a compliment.

"Now let us get into the open air," she said to Olivine, and the pair walked forth together across the hall, and down the steps, and so under the chestnuts, and over the grass to the walk above the river.

"It really is very sweet," Etta said, looking first towards London and then towards Greenwich, up and down the silent highway; "very sweet and very still," and they remained silent for a few minutes, both gazing on the waters, and each busy with her own thoughts.

Any person who, wandering now due East in search of Reach House, should find it just at the entrance to the Isle of Dogs, would scarcely recognise the river view on which Olivine and her companion looked forth that evening. Gone are the green banks sloping down

to the Thames, gone the picturesque and irregular warehouses and factories, gone the trees and the old-fashioned edifices, gone the open wharves at Deptford, and the dilapidated buildings in Rotherhithe, over which a painter might have rejoiced in the early morning, or when the rich sunset bathed the strange quaint houses in a glory of all wonderful colours.

Gone; ah, Heaven! it is but a few years, and yet the place is changed past recognition. Where were trees and fields, are now bristling masts and huge iron-works: there used to be pretty houses and ivy-covered cottages on the island where Charles II. kept his spaniels. But the other day, I was asking concerning one of those same ivy-covered cottages, with lawn sloping down to the river's brink, and behold, the place where it once stood knows it no more. There is change everywhere — the colour factory I picked my way through three years since, — the experimental chamber where I sat among carmines and greens, among pots and pans, among all manner of chemical apparatus, are swept away. The barrels, the vats, the pans, the raw materials and the manufactured articles, have all been removed. A century formerly scarcely sufficed to effect the changes a few months does now. The men and the women who used to reside due East, and leavened it with a certain leaven of wealth, solidity, and respectability, have all chosen for themselves homes elsewhere. What tradesman now resides over his shop in the city? What shipbuilder, or ironfounder, or wharfinger would dream of living on the Isle of Dogs? It is all changed, the old inhabitants are gone, and the old places with them, and the scene over which the eye wanders to-day from the garden of Reach House is

as unlike that on which Olivine Barbour and Henrietta Alwyn gazed, as the present half-finished terminus of the South-Eastern Railway in Cannon Street is unlike the old churchyard and the quiet court, the sites whereof it occupies.

To the left lay, as I have said, the shore line of the Isle of Dogs, with here a house and there a factory, but with plenty of green running down towards the water and relieving the eye; to the right were the strange old buildings previously mentioned, tumble-down warehouses, eccentric wharves, jutting out unexpectedly into the river, and growing elder bushes and willows, as well as barges; beyond these were Shadwell and Wapping, with St. George's-in-the-East rising and making a point of sight in the distance; over the way Rotherhithe stood airing its dilapidated granaries, and its black wharves, in the rays of the evening sun; a little lower the masts in the shipbuilders' yards at Deptford, and the glass in the windows of the chemical factories shone in the golden glory, while far far away could be seen Shooter's Hill, and those other rising grounds where the Crystal Palace now stands.

And between the north side and the south the river pursued its way peacefully, through the outskirts of the great city, past Execution Dock, over the spot where the bodies of pirates once swung opposite Blackwell — (a ghastly sight to any one coming up the Thames for the first time to have for greeting) — past Greenwich and Woolwich, and so away to Erith and Greenhithe to Purfleet and Grays, and thence, slacking its speed a trifle perhaps, onwards towards the sea.

"It is very sweet and still," Etta repeated; "but I

cannot imagine how Percy Forbes endures such an existence."

"Lawrence's life was equally monotonous," Olivine answered.

"Yes, child; but 'was' and 'is' makes all the difference," retorted Mrs. Gainswoode.

"Mr. Forbes may marry, though," Olivine ventured to suggest.

Very sharply Mrs. Gainswoode turned round upon the speaker, with her lips half-parted, as if they had a sentence trembling for utterance upon them; but immediately she closed her mouth resolutely, and looked out upon the river once again.

"You were going to say something," Olivine suggested.

"Was I? Well, I won't say it, then. I will merely remark instead, that — that — I am sure had we been sisters my life might have proved a different one. You are so good and so innocent. Oh, God! how innocent you are!"

At the bottom of the garden which was once Percy Forbes', there is a strong post and rail fence, over which any one standing on the walk can look down at the Thames, flowing perhaps twenty feet beneath. Against this rude parapet Mrs. Gainswoode was leaning as she spoke, and she stretched her clasped hands out beyond the wooden enclosure with such a gesture of despair that Olivine could not help but marvel at it.

"I am very sorry," she began.

"Sorry you are the pure, angelic creature you are," laughed Mrs. Gainswoode; but the laugh was forced, her tone unnatural. "If I were a man, Olivine, how I would love you — if I were your husband, how I

would keep you. When you find a favourable opportunity, you can tell Lawrence Barbour, with my compliments, he is a fool, and that he will find out his folly some day. Kiss me, child, and let me go. Do you mind kissing me?" and she held Olivine to her breast for a moment, while her tears fell thick and fast over her face.

"What a simpleton I am!" she exclaimed. "No, child, I cannot tell you all that is in my heart, and it could not do you any good to know a quarter of what is in it. You will come and stay with me, will you not? And if I were you I should try to get my uncle out of town, away from residing in London altogether. You understand. It would be better for him, and better for you, and better for Lawrence — Mr. Barbour. And now come back to the house, that I may tell them to get the brougham round."

"Must you go so soon?" Olivine asked, regretfully. There was a great charm about this woman, with her singular hair, with her wonderful beauty, with her dress which as she walked swept over the grass after her like a train, with her knowledge of the world — such as that knowledge was — with her easy manners, her confident address; a sort of fascination for one who had been brought up, like Olivine, in a social convent, where she had no opportunity given her of seeing other maidens and matrons, and forming a just estimate of how much of the wealth Mrs. Gainswoode flaunted was a snare and a delusion, consisting of gilding instead of gold, electro-plate instead of silver.

It was natural, considering her education, that the sparkle and the glitter, the unembarrassed manner, the quick retort, should prove attractive to both eye and

ear, and cause her to regard Mrs. Gainswoode with perhaps undue admiration. The ideal of perfection in the minds of most women is usually the opposite of themselves. Female friends are rarely selected on the principle of like, liking like; rather L'Allegro and L'Andante pace side by side along shady walks, over field-paths, across the sands when the tide is low; or talk together about the new curate and their handsomest partners, about their next dresses, and their affianced husbands in the mornings, before visitors are admitted; or in that still more sacred and delicious hour, when, their back hair being loosened, their hearts are one, when the fire in the dressing-room blazes brightly, and Agatha pours her tale of woe into the ear of Jeannette, and Jeannette administers comfort, warming her pretty feet, and screening her complexion from the glowing coals the while.

Never a woman before had heartily and unjealously admired Mrs. Gainswoode, and perhaps it was for this reason that Etta felt a kind of compunction towards Olivine — a species of half-compassionate, half-contemptuous tenderness.

Further, the young wife was good, and Etta's experiences had not thrown her into close contact with much in this life which was either very good or very innocent.

Far away down in the natures of most I suppose there is some well of purity, that bubbles up to the surface rejoicingly, when touched by a hand, which is still perfectly unstained, and unconscious of evil. Let this be as it will, however, one thing is certain, when Etta was with Olivine she always wished for the time being she had been brought up like her. Though she

thought virtue wearisome, and propriety unendurable, though she could not have lived Olivine's life for a week, though she declared she knew she should never be happy in Heaven, still there came into her heart every now and then a terrible longing to be different, a sickening desire to undo the past and the years that were gone, and, beginning existence on a new plan, start with swiftness on a different road, which should not have Unrest marked on its every mile-stone, and Misery for its termination.

Pausing for a moment in her walk across the grass, with some such feelings passing through her mind, she answered,

"So soon! I have been here nearly three hours, pretty one. It was not 'so soon' the first time I ever saw you, Olivine. How well I remember that evening, and your sober little face, and your old-fashioned manner, and your fearfully candid answers."

"I was terribly rude, I recollect," Olivine replied; "but now, confess, were you not a little rude to me, also? Did not you show too plainly how completely beneath your notice you considered me. I was only a child, to be sure ——"

"Good heavens! but what a child!" interrupted Mrs. Gainswoode, laughing and plucking a leaf off the Hedgehog Holly, which she kept turning and twisting as she walked on, talking while she went. "A child who saw everything and forgot nothing; who was a great deal wiser in those days than she is now; who was as courteous as one of the old dowagers in the Faubourg St. Germain, and as stately and inaccessible as one of the blood royal. If I was not civil to you

that evening, my dear, believe me it was through excess of fear."

"You left the flowers I gathered," Olivine persisted; and then, suddenly, there came a memory to both of them, and involuntarily they turned their eyes to the ground, while Etta's cheeks grew pale and Olivine's crimson.

"I really must get home now," Mrs. Gainswoode said, after a pause, and she repeated the same sentence to Mr. Sondes and Percy Forbes, who met them under the chestnut tree.

"I am sorry to have to bid you good-by, Mrs. Gainswoode," observed Lawrence, joining the group a minute later; "but it is necessary for me to call in Distaff Yard this evening."

"I will drop you there," Etta was about to suggest, but she refrained. For once in her life she had pity, and contented herself with asking after Mr. Perkins, and Mrs. Perkins, and all the little Perkinses.

"Ada is going to be married," Olivine informed her.

"No!" exclaimed Mrs. Gainswoode. "Is she really? I'd give anything to see her as a bride. Let me know when it is to take place and where. Do now, like a dear ——"

"I am sorry to say I must go," Lawrence repeated, and he shook hands with Mrs. Gainswoode and departed.

"So must I," remarked Etta, looking after him, as he walked away, but still she did not go.

She stayed to have a cup of coffee, and then she began talking about Mallingford and their neighbours. She was in high spirits, and out of her husband's

hearing she quizzed the "respectabilities" to her heart's content.

Their establishments, their ideas, their pleasures, their virtues, religion, prejudices, their dinners, balls, attainments — Etta had a fling at all; at the mothers, the husbands, the sons, the daughters.

"And Mr. Gainswoode likes it," she finished. "Positively he would rather go to the lying-in-state of a lord, than to the most amusing party people in a lower rank could give. He was made for that life; but to poor me it is death, — absolutely, Mr. Sondes, it is death."

Whereupon Mr. Sondes took up the side of the county families, and said that Mrs. Gainswoode must have been singularly unfortunate in her experiences; for his part he considered such society the best, the pleasantest, the most agreeable, a man could desire to enter.

"But then I am a woman, Mr. Sondes," said Etta; "and I can assure you, after London, a series of stiff dinner-parties, where one meets the same people over and over again, and hears about poachers, and rheumatic old women, and the new schools, and the old churches, and politics, and the changes of the ministry, cannot be called amusing. It may be improving, but then I do not want to be improved; and if I did I could read the Times, and some of those light pamphlets Mr. Gainswoode is so fond of getting from his bookseller. The fact is, the country wants to be reformed. I hear a great deal of talk about amusing the working-classes, but I think if, on the contrary, some one were to amuse the upper classes, it would be much more to the purpose. You may depend upon it, the

dead-aliveness of ordinary country society is the reason why no human being stays in the country who can help it. An evening from home there signifies something analogous to what an evening at the Mechanics' Institute involves to the working-man; but, however, you shall see, Olivine, when you come down, and you shall also see whether I cannot induce Mr. Gainswoode to reside more in London."

"I wonder you do not avail yourself of the opportunity of doing something new," Percy Forbes remarked. "Why do you not make the country agreeable? I suppose the country is, after all, very much like the world; there is no absolute wickedness in the world itself. The inhabitants of the earth make it wicked, and in like manner it is the dwellers in the country who are dull, not the country itself."

"Well," said Etta, as he paused, "supposing you are right, what then?"

"Why, then, how charming it would be to such a woman as yourself, for instance, to establish a new order of things. It is so rare and so delicious to find a new field of labour in the present day, any mine of success unworked, that I should really advise you to consider my suggestion. Set the fashion of making a country house pleasant and unlike a family vault. Get up a mission, print tracts, hold house-to-house meetings, preach the new doctrine of pleasure in season and out of season, and establish an order of things in stately mansions surrounded by deer parks and turnip-fields, for which generations yet unborn shall bless the holy and virtuous and sainted memory of Dame Henrietta Gainswoode."

"It is not polite to make fun of your guest, Mr. Forbes, even though she be almost self-invited," remarked Etta, flushing with anger, more perhaps at Percy's tone than at his words.

"A thousand pardons," he answered. "In my innocence I thought we were making fun of your hosts."

"I shall go," she declared, rising in a fit of annoyance, either real or assumed; but Mr. Sondes interposed, and declared he was certain Mr. Forbes had not meant to vex her, that she had mistaken his meaning, that they would all be grieved and hurt if she left them in displeasure.

"Set me some terrible penance," entreated Percy; "anything so that I may earn your forgiveness for my ill-timed levity."

"Order my brougham," she said, holding out her hand in token of peace.

Percy bent gravely one knee, and kissed it.

"I thank you, most gracious princess," he said, and went straightway to do her bidding.

In utter silence Olivine contemplated this little performance; she could not have said what she disliked about the conversation and the scene, and yet she had that instinctive feeling of not being perfectly safe in Henrietta Gainswoode's society, which comes to many women long before they can put a single doubt into shape.

Vaguely it crossed her mind that perhaps the county ladies had reason for their cold formality, that possibly Mr. Gainswoode did right in keeping his wife away from London, that manners might be too easy, that a little stiffness might be better than the utter absence of

all restraint. Mrs. Barbour had now her stake in the national proprieties. She owned a husband whom she should not like to see on his knees before Etta Gainswoode, or any other woman living. Poor child! she grew hot, she grew cold, she shivered, and felt uneasy, and the next minute she hated herself for being so straitlaced, when the object of her secret disapproval insisted on taking her uncle to Stepney Causeway.

"Run, and put on your bonnet, Olivine," she said, "it will be far pleasanter for Mr. Sondes than a jolting cab," and she was so good, and so kind, and so sweet all the way to their home, that Olivine kissed her twice when they parted, and agreed if "Lawrence gave her leave she would go down to Mallingford very soon."

"What an obedient wife it is," Mrs. Gainswoode said laughingly to Mr. Sondes. "How long will the submission last, do you suppose?"

"For life, I hope," he answered, and she, declaring "we shall see," drove off, leaving Olivine standing on the hall-door steps looking after the departing carriage.

"Come in, Olivine," said her uncle, and she obeyed mechanically.

After she had settled him comfortably in his favourite chair, found him his slippers, placed the candles beside him, and brought him the book he asked for, Olivine left the drawing-room and went up to her own room.

She wanted to be alone — perfectly alone; she wanted to think over the events of the day, to make up her mind for certain whether she liked or disliked Mrs. Gainswoode, and if she disliked her, why she did

so. That speech about the obedience had spoiled the effect of all Etta's kind words and considerate attentions. Why should not Olivine obey her husband? why should it not be her pleasure as well as her duty to do nothing without first consulting him and obtaining his permission? If Mrs. Gainswoode liked to laugh at her husband, ridicule his peculiarities, and make light of his kindness, was that any reason why she, Olivine, should not think Lawrence perfection?

And what could be Etta's motive for advising her to get her uncle out of town, and saying it would be better for all of them?

"I should see less of Lawrence than I do even now," thought the poor young wife, and her eyes filled full of tears at the bare idea. "And I was to tell him from her he was a fool, and that he would find out his folly some day. Does she think, I wonder, that he does not care for me, that he could never love another after her? Oh, Lawrence, Lawrence!" and the dear arms went out to meet vacancy, and then fell heavily on her lap, while the hot tears poured down her cheeks.

"I cannot think what is the matter with me to-night," she said, at last; and then she bathed her eyes and face in water, deciding that she was only nervous, and had no real trouble to make her cry. In the twilight she stood arguing out this point with herself — arguing she had not a present sorrow in the world, that she was as happy — now her uncle appeared getting better — as any woman could be.

"Each day Lawrence seems kinder to me than he was the day before," she thought, "and I am sure he could not have been less polite to her to-day without

absolute rudeness. I have no real trouble, none in the world."

She repeated this last sentence over to herself two or three times, as if to assure her heart of its truth; but her heart was wiser and more faithful than her tongue, and would neither be satisfied nor quieted.

Coming sorrows, like coming events, have tangible bodies which throw long shadows before them, and it was one of these shadows that now lay dark, yet impalpable, across Olivine's path. She could not get rid of an uncomfortable impression that Mrs. Gainswoode's friendship would yet work evil for her; she could not imagine what Etta meant by one half her hints and speeches; she did not comprehend her tears, her kisses, her sharpness, her kindness. She thought she would tell her husband everything that had occurred — every word which had been said. But then again she remembered he had once loved Etta, and she felt it was impossible for her to repeat the conversation which had passed between them to him. Mrs. Gainswoode was a subject on which she must keep her lips sealed. She had never meant to have even a thought secret from Lawrence, and now ——

"Olivine, dearest, what are you doing here all alone in the dark," Lawrence said, opening the door at this juncture, and speaking to her through the twilight.

"I have been so lonely without you all the evening," she answered a little irrelevantly, and she stretched out her arms again, this time however not to meet vacancy, and twining them round his neck, nestled her head against his breast.

Very gently Lawrence put aside her hair and touched her cheek.

"Why, you foolish child," he said, "what is the matter? what have you been fretting about?"

"Never mind that," she replied. "I am crying now, because I am so happy."

Once again he swept the hair aside from her face, kissing it tenderly. Better than she, he understood the source of her trouble; more clearly than her eyes could discern the body of that sorrow which was already throwing its shadow over them he could see its shape; but he did not say to Olivine that he suspected the cause of her grief, and Olivine, true to her determination, never in those early days mentioned Etta's name to him in connection with anything disagreeable.

Even with her arms round his neck, with his lips pressed to hers, with her tears falling on him, and his hand lovingly straying among the braids of her luxuriant hair, they were setting out that night on different paths, separate and lonely!

CHAPTER VII.

At Mallingford.

THE autumnal tints were on the trees surrounding Mallingford End, when Olivine and her uncle made their appearance at Mr. Gainswoode's residence.

Many circumstances had conspired to delay their departure from London, and not the least of these was Olivine's reluctance to accept Etta's invitation unless her husband went with her.

She was but a young wife, and very fond, more-

over, of the man into whose hands she had elected to cast her lot; and accordingly she waited and waited, hoping each day that Lawrence would relent and go with them, or otherwise desire her to write to Etta, declining the invitation altogether.

No such thing, however: Lawrence, on the contrary, recommended her to go and have it over.

"If your uncle did not mean to avail himself of Mrs. Gainswoode's kindness, he ought to have said so," remarked the young man, a little bitterly; "and although I cannot leave town, there is no earthly reason, so far as I can see, that *you*, who have no business of any kind to attend to, should shut yourself up all the summer in Stepney Causeway."

"But, Lawrence, why cannot you come?" she asked, timidly.

"Why did we return from France?" he demanded by way of reply. "Because you wanted to be near your uncle; because I wanted to be near my work. Some one must see to things. Be assured I do not intend to let the business go to rack and ruin if I can help it."

"Still, from Saturday till Monday," she ventured to suggest.

"My dear child," he answered; "from Saturday till Monday I want rest, and it would be no rest to me to go to Mallingford. Besides, if I went to the Gainswoodes', I must go to my father's; and if I once began to run down to one place and another, I should never have a Sunday free. It is all very well to talk of change and variety; but to a man who has been hard at business all the week there is no change or variety equal to lying on the sofa in one's own house for the

whole of an afternoon, and never speaking a syllable to a human being."

"Poor Lawrence!" said Olivine, pityingly, "I will never ask you to go anywhere again, and I will not go to Mallingford now, myself."

"You silly little thing!" he exclaimed; "if I cannot visit, is that any reason you should not visit either? Because I want to rest on Sundays, is that any reason why you should stay at home for ever? No, no; you must not be so whimsical as all that comes to: you have accepted Mrs. Gainswoode's invitation, and it does not do to change and veer about like a weathercock. It will only be for a fortnight, and I shall manage capitally while you are away."

"You do not mind my being away; you would not care if I stayed away altogether," said Olivine, in a pet; and then she stood still, alarmed at the sound of the first reproachful words she had ever uttered to her husband.

As for Lawrence, he looked straight in her face, marvelling for a moment whether she were merely jesting, merely wanting him to contradict her; but when he saw there was no jesting in the matter, that out of the fulness of her heart his wife had spoken, he answered, "God help men! how are they to please women? If they do not wish their wives to leave home they are brutes; if they put no obstacles in their way they are indifferent. How am I to please you, Olivine? only tell me, and I will try to do it."

"I don't want to be pleased," she answered; and the next instant she was kissing him and begging to be forgiven.

"Say you are sorry to lose me, Lawrence," she

whispered, "and I will not mind about anything; only — only, sometimes I fancy you would not miss me — if I were to be away for months and months — and I cannot bear it — I cannot," and she covered her face with her hands, and stood silent, while Lawrence declared he should like to have her with him every hour in the day; that he should miss her more than he could tell; that home would not be home to him where she was not; that he loved her more than anyone on earth.

"If I were as jealous as you are, Olivine," he added lightly, "I should make your life a misery to you. As it is, sometimes I think I am very badly treated, never having you all to myself when I come home in the evenings. I often envy men who have homes of their own, and no one to come between their wives and themselves."

"Hush — hush, pray hush!" she said, her face changing, as though with the effect of some sudden pain.

"Well, will you 'hush,' then, too, you silly little puss?" he bargained. "Will you remember there are two sides to every question, and that a man has his feelings just as well as a woman, though he may not make such a fuss about them."

"Yes," she agreed; and then at once, after the fashion of all her sex, she returned to the forbidden subject with, "But, Lawrence, I do see so little of you. It is business, business, business, from Monday morning till Saturday night."

"Quite true, dear," replied Lawrence; "if you wanted to get rid of business, you ought to have married a man who had not to work for his living.

If I were an earl I should probably talk as little of Goodman's Fields as I do now of Buckingham Palace."

"Do not ridicule me," she entreated, "merely because I say we see little of each other, and that — that — it vexes me."

She was pathetic, for her heart was full; persistent, because she felt they were drifting away, he from her, and, spite of all her efforts, she from him. Useless though the movement might be, she could not help instinctively putting out her little hand, and trying to keep the bark of his life beside her own.

But that was precisely the kind of attempt most likely to irritate such a man as Lawrence. That he did not love her passionately he knew; and for her even to intimate that she suspected this also, was simply pouring vinegar into the already open wound.

That he did love her tenderly, compassionately, and, to the best of his ability, faithfully, he believed; that he had fought out a battle with his own heart since his marriage, — that he had resisted temptation, that he was even then striving to keep himself out of the way of temptation, he was perfectly well aware; and it provoked him to hear what he considered his wife's foolish fancies, to listen to her reproaches, as he mentally called them, when it was utterly impossible for her to understand him, or his feelings, or his troubles, or his projects.

One thing, however, he was resolved on — namely, that Olivine should not become exacting, and accordingly he placed her in an easy chair, and sitting down himself near her — a rare piece of indolence for Lawrence in the middle of the day — began to talk to his wife gravely and determinedly.

"It may save us both a vast amount of pain hereafter," he said, "if I can make you comprehend my exact position now. Do not look vexed, pet. I am not going to say a word to annoy you." (She was so young, and she looked so pretty, that Lawrence felt constrained to utter this sentence, though it had certainly never entered into his original programme to do so.) "When you married me, you married a poor man; and being a poor man, I must work for my wife and myself like any other labourer."

"Oh! Lawrence," she cried, "uncle could never—"

"Your uncle, child, would never have given you to me, had he not thought it was in me to work as hard for my living as any man he ever knew. He trusted me, and I am not going to disappoint that trust. You would not love me if I neglected my duties for the sake of staying constantly at home with you."

"I did not mean constantly," she explained, "only sometimes."

"Well, but at what times, when I can be with you, am I ever away? Do I visit? — do I go to any place of amusement? — do I even take a walk without you?"

"No!" she agreed. "Don't — don't go on like that!" she entreated. "I did not intend to complain, Lawrence. I cannot imagine what made me say what I did. It was foolish of me, and wicked, for you are so good to me — too good," and she took his hand and rubbed it up and down against her cheek, and prayed him to cease "explaining." "For I know all about it," finished the young creature he had married. "I know how hard you work; and it was a

shame for me to speak as I did, and I am grieved — so grieved."

"I came to London poor," he went on, unheeding her request, "and I am comparatively poor still. When the day comes that I can see a competence without labour, I daresay I shall be able to idle as well as anyone; but until then I must be busy, and I am confident my wife will not try to make my path harder for me than it is."

"I would make it all grass under your feet if I could," she answered.

"And you will not fret me and yourself because it is impossible I should always be at your side?"

"I will try not;" and then with a little sob she added, "have patience with me, Lawrence. My uncle and I were always so much together, that I thought perhaps we might be the same."

"He had not his way to make," her husband replied, "I have. That is the root of the whole matter. Are you sorry you married a poor man, Olivine? If you are, it is too late for you to repent now."

"Sorry!" She repeated the word after him in a sort of wonder. "If I could marry you fifty times I would, to show you whether I am sorry or not. But perhaps if you were single, you would not marry me. Is that what you mean? — is that it?"

"Now, Olivine!" He held up his finger, warning her off this forbidden ground.

"I won't be foolish again," she answered; "only say once that you are not sorry, that you are not tired of me, that you do not want me to go to Mallingford to be rid of me — because, Lawrence, I do love you so much! And when I am here all alone, I have

nothing to do but think about you, and fancy all sorts of things; whilst you have your business, and your workmen, and your letters, and your accounts to occupy you."

It was the old story of the chapter and the book, the verse and the poem. She was but a chapter in his life to him — but a verse of the long ballad — while to her he was book and poem; she was part to him — he was the whole to her; and with a dim perception of this truth, with a partial consciousness that it was a terrible thing for one human being to love another as much as Olivine loved him — vainly — he drew her close to him, and murmuring, —

"Poor child, poor darling," gave her what assurance of love she wanted — answered all her petition as she had desired.

"So that is all settled," he said at last; "and you will not delay your visit any longer?"

"No," she replied; "the sooner we go, the sooner I shall be back. I have heard of girls at school counting the days to vacation. I think I shall count the days while I am at school, till I come home to you."

At which speech Lawrence laughed, and declared she was spoiling him: a statement that Mrs. Gainswoode repeated more than once while Olivine remained at Mallingford.

"You are a great deal too fond of your husband, Olivine," she said; "and what is worse, you let him see you are. Take my advice, and do not make so much fuss about him. Let him imagine you have something else to think about occasionally. Make

believe, at all events, that he is not always in your mind."

"Oh! I could not do that," Olivine answered; whereupon Mrs. Gainswoode replied, —

"Take your own way, then; but you will hereafter repent not following my advice. Unless I am greatly mistaken in him, Lawrence Barbour is not the man to like a wife any the better because she is devoted to him. What is had cheaply is rarely prized highly."

"What right, Mrs. Gainswoode, have you to speak in that way of my husband?" inquired Olivine, a little irritated.

"My dear, is there any law to prevent my speaking out my mind about your husband, if I choose?" asked Etta in return. "He is a very excellent young man, and I know nothing against him — nothing, I assure you; nothing, upon my word."

And with a laugh which sounded slightly mocking, Mrs. Gainswoode retired from the contest, merely remarking to Mr. Sondes that she never in her life saw such a pair of turtle-doves as Olivine and Mr. Barbour. "To an old married woman like myself, it is quite amusing to notice the way Olivine watches the opening of the postbag, and the reams of letters she writes to him every day. And such a correspondent as he is! Scarcely a morning passes without a *billet-doux*. Really it is delightful to see a man and wife so much attached to one another."

"Yes, I think they are very much attached," Mr. Sondes answered quietly; but he could not help wondering what in the world Etta meant, and once or twice it crossed his mind that Mrs. Gainswoode was laughing in her sleeve at Lawrence and Olivine, and himself

into the bargain; and he felt certain the lady was playing a double game with her own husband. For all of which reasons Mr. Sondes rather regretted his visit to Mallingford, and began to wish the Alwyn acquaintance had been allowed to drop.

But Mr. Gainswoode was courteous beyond measure to his guests. That gentleman approved of Olivine, and thought her taste in pictures wonderful; she never wearied in trotting about after him, and would stand listening for half-an-hour at a time while he discoursed to her about the astonishing perspectives and the miraculous foreshortenings exhibited on his walls.

"If she were an artist, my love, she could not be more interested," remarked Mr. Gainswoode to his wife; whereupon that lady inquired whether it had never occurred to him Olivine was much more interested in Mallingford End than in the curiosities it contained — in the rooms, and the galleries and the grounds where Lawrence had passed his earlier years, than in the most delicate piece of china in his collection.

"My opinion of Mrs. Barbour is, that she proves a good listener, because she never hears a word you say," finished Etta, who was beginning to feel really jealous of Olivine. She did not approve of the manner of those ladies, who had always been a little shy towards her, when they called on Lawrence's wife. Instinctively she felt that were Olivine mistress of Mallingford instead of herself, society would express itself infinitely obliged to Providence for the exchange. There was something about Olivine to which the grand dowagers and the stately matrons took kindly. Mr. Sondes also, who had come of good family, was treated by the county people with a consideration Etta had never seen them

evince towards her husband; and the enjoyment Olivine took out of the house and grounds was such as appeared perfectly inexplicable to a woman who detested the country and could see no beauty in the changing seasons — no difference, as she said, between one "stupid old tree and another."

"And I do not think it is quite polite," observed Mrs. Gainswoode, on another occasion, "the way Mrs. Barbour is continually walking over to the Clay Farm. For my part, I imagined she was coming to visit me, not her father-in-law; but if she has no idea of ordinary civility, I cannot help it."

"Well, my dear, you need not speak as if it were my fault," answered Mr. Gainswoode; "it was not I who asked her to come here."

"No; but now she is here you make such a fuss about her," grumbled his wife; which remark, implying a certain amount of jealousy on the part of the beautiful Henrietta, gratified the owner of Mallingford not a little.

The matrimonial ball lay at Etta's feet in those days, and she was not slow about kicking it in whatever direction she desired. Mr. Gainswoode was so charmed at the prospect of an heir being born, that he forebore to cross his wife in anything; and as for Etta, she had turned over a new leaf, and forebore likewise to cross her husband.

One day it had come upon her like a revelation, that if she did not play her cards well, the results of the game might prove a very small fortune in case she were left a widow. A remark of her father's first induced her thoughts to roam in this direction; and once

the subject did enter her mind, she gave it mature consideration.

To a great extent she was dependent on her husband. The settlements he had made were not munificent. She had nothing to expect from her father. Altogether, Mr. Gainswoode was the person for her to conciliate, and Etta began to conciliate him accordingly.

Up to this point, their married life had been at intervals stormy. Occasionally Etta had tried for the mastery — had evinced temper — had run counter to her husband's wishes out of the spirit of sheer opposition.

In many a similar union this species of warfare is waged for a time. There are passages of arms, there are guerilla descents on the enemy at unexpected periods and at unguarded points; there is a fighting of the ground inch by inch, until the weaker of the contending powers, either longing for peace or following the dictates of prudence, cries "truce;" after which ensues a submission that means as often as not eventual victory.

Etta's temper was so peculiar, so uncertain, so naturally bad, so domineering, both from constitution and long exercise of power, that it cost her many a struggle to assume, even for an object, the *rôle* of a dutiful and obedient wife.

How many a sharp answer she bit back — how many a sarcasm she refrained from uttering — how diligently she guarded her manner to refrain from giving offence, no one excepting herself ever imagined.

Mr. Gainswoode attributed the change partly to the alteration in her father's circumstances, partly to gra-

titude for his own forbearance and consideration in the matter, and greatly to the pleasure he imagined she felt at the probability of their having a son to inherit Mallingford.

"The future mother ranks higher than the present wife," was Etta's secret feeling on this subject; but, as has been said, she refrained from uttering her thoughts, and the home of the Gainswoodes was therefore the household of peace.

"You can do me such a kindness, Mr. Sondes," she said to that gentleman the day after his arrival at Mallingford. "When you are talking to my husband about poor papa's misfortunes, speak as if you pitied him, will you? — as if he had been sinned against, certainly not sinning. I know you never were greatly in love with his way of conducting business; but you will not throw stones at him now he is down. For my sake, do not say what is thought in the commercial world about the private transfer of Mallingford. We did it for the best, you may be quite sure of that; and but for some most unfortunate speculations it would have carried us through. You may imagine, however, in what an unpleasant position this disaster has placed me. Poor papa! I do not know what is to become of him — I do not, indeed," and Etta looked very sadly over the country as she spoke, and leaned a little more heavily on Mr. Sondes' arm than was necessary, considering he was only recovering from a bad illness, and she as strong and hearty as a woman need desire to be.

"How did you know, Mrs. Gainswoode, that I never approved of your father's mode of conducting business?" asked Mr. Sondes, at once striking back to

the portion of her sentence which had impressed him, and not pleasantly.

"Oh! a little bird told me," she answered, colouring and laughing at the same time.

"I am afraid it was a very foolish bird," he said, gravely. "I thought Lawrence Barbour had more sense than to go tattling between Stepney and Hereford Street."

"Now, pray, Mr. Sondes, do not jump to conclusions. Mr. Barbour never tattled; he never told me what you thought or said on any subject. He was reserve itself. He was honour personified; you believe me?" she went on, earnestly.

Mr. Sondes looked in her face for a moment steadily, and he knew she was telling him a falsehood.

"Of course I cannot question your word," he answered; "and equally, as a matter of course, I shall say nothing calculated either to injure your father, or to annoy Mr. Gainswoode; but it is impossible for me to state I think Mr. Alwyn was sinned against. I do not think so; and for that reason I shall not express any opinion of the kind."

"You are frank, Mr. Sondes," she remarked.

"I am true," he replied; and there ensued a moment's silence.

Then Etta said, "I suppose there is no strict honesty to be looked for in any business; not even in that of an adulterator."

"Is it necessary for us to discuss business matters at all, Mrs. Gainswoode?" asked her guest, with the most imperturbable composure; "you have told me what your wishes are, and I am happy it chances to

be in my power to oblige you: shall we let the subject drop here? I have never been much accustomed to converse on such topics with a lady."

"That strikes me as a mistake," answered Etta, composedly; "you cannot tell how much wiser many women are than most men; but, however," she added, "it shall be as you wish, and I am your debtor for life."

Which finale compelled Mr. Sondes to hope that she would not consider herself indebted to him for so small a kindness, but rather afford him some future opportunity of serving her more effectually.

It is rather hard upon the rougher sex that they have to utter these petty speeches, which are usually received by ladies *au pied de la lettre*, and which the utterers oftentimes have to carry out literally.

Many a word thus spoken in haste has been repented of by men, wise and discreet, at their leisure. Not once, nor twice, but a dozen times during his stay at Mallingford, Mr. Sondes anathematised his own weakness in falling into the little trap that Etta had laid for him.

"She is no fit companion for my little girl," he decided over and over again. "Deuce take the woman! what is there about that coarse hair, and those snake's ringlets, and that singular face which makes a man almost forget where he is standing when she is talking to him. I wish I had been governed by my first impressions, and kept Mrs. Gainswoode at arm's-length; but it would be so hard never to give Olivine a chance of mixing in society, and the people here are so kind to her, and admire her so much."

This was the bait! When once Olivine was mar-

ried, Mr. Sondes did not desire she should remain shut up in the old house at Stepney; but wanted her to take her place in the world and see a little of society.

"I wish Barbour had Mallingford instead of its present owner," Lord Lallard said to Mr. Sondes, on one occasion, "and that your niece were mistress there. The Alwyns may be all very well, and so may Mr. Gainswoode; but still we have our preferences, and Barbour has worked so hard and been so brave about defying prejudice, that I think he deserves to have the old place back again."

"Ah! my lord," was the reply, "it would take a princely income to keep up Mallingford End as it ought to be maintained. No greater misfortune can befall a man than to be the owner of a place beyond his means."

"Except marrying a bad wife, I suppose you mean?" laughed his lordship. "Well, matrimonially, Barbour has done admirably; at one time, I confess, I was afraid he might have chosen differently, and worse."

"Nevertheless, Mrs. Gainswoode is a very charming woman," remarked Mr. Sondes.

"I have not the slightest doubt but that Delilah was a very charming woman, too," answered Lord Lallard, drily; and then, by mutual consent, the conversation was turned to other subjects — to the season, to the country, to the autumnal tints on tree, and shrub, and hedge; to London, to Mr. Sondes' health, to the place down near Grays he said he had some intention of buying, to the Clay Farm, and the man who lived there all alone.

That man was the greatest trouble of her life to Olivine about this period. Her heart ached for the old father, who sat there reading, with very powerful spectacles, books on heraldry, which he held with a shaking hand.

She would have liked to carry him back to town with her; she would have asked no better than to devote her young life to him, and her uncle, and Lawrence. Was not he Lawrence's father? ought they not to try to make the end of his days happier? How could she ever forget that desolate home? that comfortless house? that poor, poverty-stricken establishment?

"Lawrence is getting too great a man to come and see me now, I suppose?" said Mr. Barbour, querulously. "He is growing rich, and can only tolerate those who are rich also. There was a time when he would not have visited the Alwyns, when he would not have allowed you to cross their threshold; but that is all an old story, like the tale of how I was once owner of Mallingford, where Gainswoode, the jeweller's son, is now lording it as if he belonged to one of the best of our county families."

"Mr. Gainswoode a jeweller's son!" repeated Olivine, in amazement.

"Yes; or a pawnbroker's son, if you prefer it. His father was one of those goldsmiths, or silversmiths, or whatever they are called, that lend money to noblemen or gentlemen at an usurious interest. He left his son an enormous fortune, and, as the father had doubtless some taste in knick-knacks, and some knowledge of good paintings, the son has inherited the family talent. It is a nice connexion, child; there was a time when a gentleman would as soon have thought of sitting

down to table with a sweep as with such a man as that; but the manners and customs of the world are changing, and we — we are growing obsolete."

When Mr. Barbour spoke of "we" in this tone, he always referred to the righteous twenty among the upper ten thousand, who had not gone after strange gods, nor caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire to Moloch, and amongst whom he was one of the principal saints.

Somehow, after these interviews, Olivine, though she had good blood in her veins, and a pretty fortune of her own to boot, always crept back to Mallingford with a feeling that Lawrence had conferred a favour, and stooped from his high estate when he married her.

Those individuals who, tracing their descent back to some illiterate baron, or rough-and-ready chieftain of the good old times of misery, when might was right, but right of itself never was might, firmly believe that God made the earth and all that therein is for them and theirs, have an agreeable way of making other people think that by getting on in the world they are running counter to Heaven's high decree, and committing the unpardonable sin, when they purchase the ground from the cumberers thereof, and dress, and till, and cultivate it for their own use.

Some feeling of this kind Olivine could not avoid expressing on one occasion to Mrs. Gainswoode, who replied — not without a keen relish and enjoyment —

"And Mr. Barbour's grandmother was a drysalter's daughter, pretty one; whence the relationship with the Perkins', and your husband's business proclivities.

Birth never mates with wealth in this country, you understand; of course, great people never marry for money, never did. Blood never needs the help of bone — to adopt a very graceful Irishism — and sovereigns are not as almighty here as dollars in America. You would never imagine, to hear Mr. Barbour talk, he had a drop of blood in his body of other than the orthodox colour; but it is true nevertheless that there was once a drysalter's daughter mistress of Mallingford End — the last heiress who cast her gold into the empty treasury of a decaying race."

"How much happier people are who live quietly, and do not trouble themselves about such things," Olivine remarked, with a sigh.

"About what things, child? About money, and birth, and position, do you mean? How much happier, then, to be dead at once, if the stakes of the social game are to be taken off the board and nothing played for except domestic happiness."

"I should ask for nothing more, at all events," returned Olivine.

"You will think differently as the years go by," was the answer: "you will find money is power, and power enjoyment."

"Do not talk in that way," Olivine entreated, "or you will make me imagine you are mercenary."

At which speech Etta laughed gleefully, and declared that, as usual, Olivine's ideas were "delicious," and her simplicity "charming."

CHAPTER VIII.

In Percy's Study.

"LIFE is a good deal like champagne: all very well when you first take the cork out of the bottle, but horribly flat after it has been any time opened;" and Percy Forbes — for it was he who made this profound remark to himself — laid down "The Times," poked his fire from the top, as though he had been a woman, and, standing on the hearth-rug, discoursed to his own heart about many things.

It was not the first time by any means that he had felt weary and faint-spirited. Oftener than he would have liked to confess he had latterly felt overpowering him this dreadful dissatisfaction, this utter languor, this mental sickness, which is worse to bear than any physical pain.

There were dark hours when it seemed to his imagination that he was running a race at the end of which no prizes were to be awarded, — that he was travelling a road at the termination whereof lay no pleasant haven of rest and happiness — that he had started for a life-walk in the course of which he need not look either for much pleasure or profit; that through all the years to come no happiness might be his; that his future existence was to be all work and no play, all school and no holiday; that, in a sentence, as he mentally summed the matter up, he had passed into a world where the wine was tasteless and the cigars bad.

And yet, having most of his life still to live, it

behoved him to make the best he could of the matter. Whether all the sparkle had passed away, or excitement still lay in the wine-cup, he had no choice left but to drain the goblet to the very last drop. It was inevitable, and there is no philosophy equal to that of accepting the inevitable cheerfully. Percy Forbes knew this as well as anybody; but yet he could not help occasionally setting down the glass, and looking at its contents, before swallowing the draught.

Some time or other most people have had to take a mixture which does not, at first, seem intensely disagreeable. For a day or two the doctor's orders are followed, the prescription is duly made up, and the dose regularly taken; but by degrees the medicine becomes unendurable. It is not so bad for once, or twice, or thrice; after that, human nature begins to rebel. "Better the disease than such a cure," is the sufferer's cry; "better death than such a life!" echoes the weary worker.

It is not the bitterness of the cup; it is not the severity of the labour; it is rather the perpetual recurrence of the medicine in the one case — the utter longing for change, the perfect detestation of a monotonous round of employment, conducing to no apparently satisfactory result, in the other.

There are not many lives perhaps that would seem worth the living, if looked at with the same eyes as Percy Forbes brought to bear on the matter. His champagne had once sparkled so brightly; he had formerly floated so lightly along a river of pink, bubbling, flashing excitement, that the *vin ordinaire* of everyday existence — wholesome enough though it might be, appeared to him unendurably flat, unbearably mo-

notonous. He had taken the cork out so early in the day, that before the mid-day repast arrived, the whole beverage of life had lost its true flavour; he had enjoyed, he had idled, he had eaten his cake, he had quaffed deep of the cup of pleasure, and now the spirit was evaporated, the enjoyment over, the pleasure a sensation which he firmly believed he could never more experience.

He was often sick and weary of his existence, and he had rarely felt more sick and weary than on the especial evening of which I am speaking.

The months had passed by from the time of Olivine's marriage, and it was winter once again.

Never a winter in his remembrance had seemed so long, so cold, so dreary to Percy Forbes as that.

Business was not good; the weather was intolerable; the loneliness of Reach House something hardly to be imagined, and certainly not to be described. His lot was marked out and settled for him at last; he had no hope now of anything beyond making a sufficient income — perhaps in time of growing comparatively rich. The result of his Race for Wealth was decided. More money it was still competent for him to gain; but money's worth, the happiness all men picture to themselves, promise to their own souls, he could never now expect.

That dream was over; the foam-bell had disappeared from the surface of the waters; the bubble had burst, — the rainbow had melted away. The plains of life were free for him to traverse, but the sunshine of old lay across them no longer. There were roses, but they were scentless — fruits, but they were tasteless — wine, but it had lost its flavour. Well! every created

being must come to an hour like this, when he feels there is nothing pleasant to the palate, or grateful to the sense, or agreeable to the ear, or refreshing to the heart; when man delights him not, and woman charms him still less; when he is sick of the dream of existence, and weary of the characters he sees crossing and re-crossing the stage; when he hates the players and the plot; when he feels for a certainty that the crowns are tinsel, that the jewellery is sham, the scenery canvas, the heroines painted, the heroes padded, the diamonds unreal, the tragedy a farce, and the farce a serio-comic tragedy.

Existence does not seem on the whole desirable at such periods. The feast of life is not particularly well worth sitting out if the appetite fail after the first course. If to-day be wearily monotonous, and to-morrow promise no improvement, why should we desire to see the morrow dawn? What charm has the ball if we know the partner we once looked for is certain not to be present? Why should we labour for money when the thing for which we desired money has eluded our grasp? Who has not, at some time or other, said all this and felt all this, and then turned him to pleasure and to labour again when the fit was exhausted, — when the dark hour had passed away?

And yet, if such hours were not of rare occurrence in Percy's life, if they came more frequently in the course of his day than in the days of his fellows, who shall assert that it was because he was more discontented?

What did the man's life hold of happiness or of hope? Had his education fitted him for the monotonous existence he was leading? Was it likely a person who

had at one time lived solely for pleasure should at any period ever live solely for business — live, that is, in his soul? His body was one thing, his heart another.

After all, going into business is very like going into a new house. It may not just at first, it is true, precisely meet the whole of a man's requirements; but there is still, nevertheless, the charm of novelty about it.

The furniture may not be arranged in due order, the pictures cannot be hung in a moment, the gardens are not planted in a day, the new conservatory has still to be built, it is a question where the grand-piano is to take up its final position, the easy-chairs have not yet fitted themselves into their appropriate corners; but after all, when the day arrives, when every item is settled as it ought to be, do you think the rooms seem as perfect as the in-coming tenant fancied they could be made? do you imagine the house ever appears quite as desirable a residence as it once promised to become?

There is such scope for imagination in the first act of taking possession; the mind plans, furnishes, decorates, enjoys, in that dreamland where no natural laws interfere, to hinder the work of the builder, to mar the designs of the architect. There stands the house for fancy to beautify as it will; there lies the ground to be planted and divided, for walks to be cut through, for gardens to be formed in; — and behold! before ever a curtain is hung; before the rosewood and the damask, the mirrors and the carpets, appear actually on the scene, the rooms look as no upholsterer could hope to leave them.

Never an hour's work has labourer or surveyor done about the place; not a shilling of capital has been expended, and yet see! — the trees grow, and the flowers

spring, and the walks wind away through the shrubberies, and lead up to the summit of that distant hill; deer are lying in the park, cattle browse in the pleasant fields, the gates swing wide, and the honeysuckle creeps up the walls of the porter's lodge. Through the hedge, neatly trimmed and kept, that divides the flower-garden from the paddock, roses grow, and passion-flowers twine. Out of a bare common, — out of an empty house, — the mind of man can create a paradise. If some trifle in the situation, in the way the land slopes to the south or west happen to strike his fancy, Eden itself could not have been a fairer dwelling-place than the dream-Eden that can be conjured up with the sunlight streaming across a barren moor, or the evening shadows stealing through the deserted rooms of a lonely house.

True, yet typical, friends; though sad, still underneath the sadness lies the germ of an eternal hope. If the hand may never perfect here what the mind is capable of conceiving — if the ideal of beauty and of happiness be far above everything which mortality can touch while it is mortal except in spirit, may we not feel confident that, although here man is unable to perfect his ideal, still that hereafter he will wake to find the dreams of his life were the realities thereof? that it was only when he stood without in the cold, battling with the troubles of earth, his soul darkened by its shadows, his mind fettered by the flesh, he saw phantoms face to face, and through a glass dimly, the glory, and the beauty, and the happiness of the Eternal Land?

Dreams, you will say, mocking me back; dreams for the poet to sing of, for the idle to amuse them-

selves with, out of place in the mind of a man like Percy Forbes, or in a chapter concerning him; but, ah! are not all men sometimes poets at heart? are not all human beings idle mentally to the extent of dreaming dreams, and seeing visions now and then?

The acknowledgment of disappointment; of life having been wasted; of mistakes having been made; of sorrow, remorse, misery; — what are these things but the reverse of the shield?

The dream must have preceded the waking; the imaginary happiness the real grief; and the man who is capable of suffering, must consciously or unconsciously have been capable likewise of a visionary enjoyment. The prince in his palace may be able to tell of his aspirations as well as of his failure; but the man plodding over ledgers, labouring on the business treadmill, driving bargains, calculating ways and means, can have felt aspirations just as well as the prince, though possibly he will remain dumb, so far as the language of the heart is concerned, till the string of his tongue is loosed by the hand of death.

There is not a man of whom mention has been made throughout all the preceding pages that could have found words in which to clothe the secrets of his inner life; but yet, after his own fashion, each one of them felt — and feeling was the employment Percy Forbes often selected when no more pressing occupation presented itself.

He was a disappointed man and a lonely. He had imagined great things were to be done in business; and, after all, he found it dull, plodding work. It was mere living, and living in some moods appears an awfully prosaic sort of proceeding. He had built his

ships, he had reared his palaces, he had amassed a fortune mentally, when he first took possession of his new house!

The years had come since then, and the years were gone; and still it was men turning to their labour; men earning their wages; orders being received; orders being executed; hard work all the week; a Sunday of utter rest;— the same home, the same views, the same routine of employment, the same rising and dressing, the same lying down and taking slumber; the same life, only with the hope out of it; the dream-castle built, but with the light imagination had cast over the edifice faded; the enchantment of distance dispelled the sunshine of fancy gleaming on wall and battlement, on vane and pinnacle; — no more, no more!

When he was in the house, Percy abode in the lower apartments but little; rather preferring to occupy three rooms on the first floor, that, communicating each with the other, were specially convenient for the habitation of a person filling the position in which Mr. Forbes was placed.

If any of my readers should ever chance to pass inside the walls of Reach House, he will, on ascending the staircase, have no difficulty in discovering the apartments where this man spent so many hours of his life.

Opposite the head of the staircase in his dressing-room (now vacant); and the wide balcony from which he used to watch the river gliding away, and the vessels bound for foreign shores dropping down the Thames, all sails shining in the early morning sun, along the entire front of the house, outside dressing-

room and bed-chamber, and a great chamber at the north end, with which apartment, however, our story has no concern.

Beside the dressing-room, therefore, lay his bed-chamber, and at the back of the latter was his study, which had a door communicating with the lobby at the head of the stairs. This study had a window commanding a view of the ship-yard, and of everything which was going on there, and from his bath-room, behind the study, he could still see the tall masts and the great hulks of the vessels lying so high above the river, and stranded, as it were, in the dry dock.

It was a nice suite of apartments for a business man — snug, convenient, compact. Often when the city offices were closed, when the steamers had ceased plying, when the great heart of the modern Babylon was throbbing quietly in the darkness, when the lamps were bright, and along the shore were lights, and at the prow of every vessel there hung lanterns, glittering like glow-worms through the night, Percy Forbes was wont to sit in the balcony, smoking, while he thought out his difficulties or perfected his plans.

Long after the servants were asleep, he, the sole watcher in that house, used to keep his vigil, thinking his thoughts, mourning his dead hopes, in the solemn stillness.

And when the weather was too inclement for this, when the snow lay on the ground, and the trees were bare, and the river rough and its waters angry, he would retire to his study, and there, beside the fire, preach sermons to himself about the uselessness of regret, the expediency of contentment; and the end of the sermon, like the end of most sermons, always

found him more down-hearted, more discontented than the beginning.

Standing, looking down upon the blazing coals he is not so young as he was when we first met him in Hyde Park. Perhaps that fact had something to do with his dissatisfaction. When a man is close on five-and-thirty he can scarcely be expected to have the same elastic spirits as at five-and-twenty. The flavour of the wine is to a great extent gone; it can never taste like nectar again, at all events. The years to come never look so inviting to a man, as to a youth; and this man had worked during the interval between his first visit to Stepney and the days when we find him a resident there. He had worked, and work leaves its traces in scars that may be and are, oftentimes, honourable, but which still cannot be called aught but scars, nevertheless. Altogether Percy Forbes is not so handsome or so distinguished-looking, or so light-hearted as he was in that time, lying now far back in this story, when he first made his way into it. His walk is not quite the same as formerly; his talk is certainly different; his thoughts are different likewise, and his feelings and wishes more changed than all. He is gentlemanly as ever, but the little airs of dandyism have departed; a little of the polish has been rubbed off his manners; his address has lost some of its elegant leisureliness; he has mixed little with men whose ways have been made smooth for them, and much with men whose business it is to make smooth the roads along which others drive in carriages. He has been with labour, and it is the tendency of labour to harden those whom it touches, strengthening them likewise. He has not always had time to consider

externals; he has been among people who consider it waste of precious minutes to attend much to externals at all; and for all these reasons, and because, in addition, he has thought, and has felt, and has suffered much, Percy Forbes is not quite the same man that he was when he came to Reach House, and took up his abode in the Isle of Dogs.

He is a man whom Mr. Sondes likes much better than he at one time ever thought to like what he was pleased to call "a fashionable popinjay." On Mr. Sondes Percy's thoughts at last settled, and he was trying to make up his mind as to whether or no he should call the next day in Stepney Causeway, when the door of his study gently opened, and Mr. Sondes entered unannounced.

"I make no apology for intruding," remarked the new comer.

"You find me very busy — doing nothing," answered Percy, and the two shook hands.

"A man may be very busy doing nothing, if he does that thoroughly," was Mr. Sondes' reply; after which he sat down, and began to tell Percy about the state of the weather and the difficulty of procuring a cab, and a few other such interesting matters, that ended at last in the very direct question, —

"Why have you not been round to see us, Forbes, for a week or more?"

"There has been a good deal to do here," Percy answered. "Every day I seem to have more and more to attend to."

"And there will go on being more and more, till you drop us altogether, I suppose —"

"I hope not," Percy answered; but he turned to

the fire as he spoke, and there came a look into his face, the meaning of which Mr. Sondes understood perfectly.

"So I am compelled to come and see you," proceeded the older man; "for there are many matters which I wish to talk over with you. But, first of all, let me ask you one question. Do you remember the promise you made me one night at Grays?"

"Perfectly," was the reply.

"Do you repent it?"

"No," Percy answered.

"If you do, I will absolve you from it."

"I have no wish to be absolved. Were the time to come over again, I would give you the same promise cheerfully and willingly as I gave it then."

"Hereafter it may place you in a painful position."

"Had you thought the sunshine could last for ever — had you not been afraid of storms and breakers — you would never have asked me to give it," the younger man answered, with a kind of constraint on him; and he turned towards the fire again.

"True," said Mr. Sondes; and there ensued silence for a moment, during the continuance of which each was busy following out his own separate train of thought.

Suddenly, Percy broke the stillness by inquiring — "I hope you are better, sir. I trust your health is now really improving?"

"Have you forgotten what I told you?" asked Mr. Sondes, in reply.

"No; but I thought — I hoped — Doctors are not

infallible; and even apparently incurable diseases have ere now found a physician able and willing to heal."

"Mine has not, at any rate," answered the other. And once again there ensued a dead silence.

It was curious to see how these two men fenced with the subject that lay next to the hearts of both. Two women would have rushed into the matter open-mouthed: would have talked and wept, and wept and explained; and then taken comfort, and wept and talked again. But the pair I am speaking of followed the usual masculine course, and kept as far as possible away from the question on which both desired to touch. Round their quarry they described gradually decreasing circles, and then commenced, walking round the widest of these circles first.

At length, however, Mr. Sondes reached the very centre-point of the business; and when he had done so, he said, abruptly, —

"Forbes, you and Lawrence have quarrelled ——"

"And if we have?" Percy answered, facing about, and feeling the hour had come at last.

"Then I should like to know what the quarrel has been about," Mr. Sondes finished.

"He said I took too much on me — and perhaps he was right. When one man unasked undertakes to advise another, he may fairly be accused of meddling. I did meddle in Lawrence Barbour's concerns — and got snubbed for my pains. I do not blame him — I might have been no more patient than he, had our respective positions been reversed. But I had not any intention of ceasing to visit at your house in consequence of our disagrement. It is not that which has kept me away."

"Then what has kept you away?" inquired Mr. Sondes.

"Mrs. Gainswoode," was the reply. "Beyond all women who ever lived, I think I dislike that woman; and had your niece married me instead of Barbour, I would no more have opened my doors to admit Etta Alwyn, than I would open them now to admit the plague."

"You speak strongly," said Mr. Sondes.

"Not too strongly," answered Percy Forbes. "I knew her before you or Barbour knew her: I consider her a bad, designing woman, and one whose companionship can do no good to any other woman."

"Water and oil cannot mix," suggested Mr. Sondes, deprecatingly.

"True; but still, contact with oil spoils water," answered Percy, and he laughed; but his laugh was not hearty, and the face Mr. Sondes looked into was the face almost of an old and soured man.

"Forbes, has it ever occurred to you ——" began Mr. Sondes, and then he stopped.

"Has what ever occurred to me?" demanded the other in return. "If there is anything you want to know, sir," he went on, speaking hurriedly, "you must ask me plain questions, and desire me to give you plain answers. I will not guess at your wishes, nor conjecture your desires."

"There was a time when I did not like you, Forbes," began Mr. Sondes, a little indirectly, as perhaps the reader may consider, — "when I thought you a fop, a butterfly, when I would not have had you dangling about my house for any consideration, and ——"

"I know all that," Percy interposed; "you only

saw the gay shell, and you did not then imagine what a poor, humble, incapable creature had it for a covering. You thought me God knows what, that first day I ever crossed your threshold — a swindler, a swell-mobsman, an area-sneak, perhaps, or something equally respectable."

"Nay, nay," broke in Mr. Sondes.

"But I say, yea," persisted Percy: "you had found a *rara avis*, free from all the sins and follies that disfigured me, — a nightingale all gray, without a handsome feather anywhere, — and the impression the cockatoo, as you considered me, made on your mind was therefore unfavourable in the extreme. Is there any need for me to go on? We went over all this ground a year since, did we not? You found the snail but a plodding, stupid fellow, after all; you confessed your nightingale fell short of perfection. I told you then all I had to tell against Lawrence Barbour, and still you elected to give your niece to him."

"She was fond of him," suggested Mr. Sondes.

"And so were you," retorted Percy, almost fiercely; he had been thinking over the matter before his visitor came in, and every turn of it was fresh in his mind — "So were you, — the business man liked his immense application; the clever man liked his extraordinary ability; the recluse admired his steadiness. What chance had I against him? If you had given me your niece, you would never have liked me as you like him."

"And yet I trust you further than I trust him, Forbes."

"Simply because I have no pecuniary interest in your concerns," returned the younger man. "If I speak

plainly to-night, it is because I have been thinking about my own life till I am almost mad. I shall never have a wife to gladden my home. You have doomed me to go on alone — alone. The best thing I could do would be to emigrate. I wish to God I had emigrated when I first thought of doing so! I am sick of this existence. The monotony is unendurable, the loneliness insupportable!"

And having said his say, Percy Forbes laid his arm on the mantelshelf and his head upon it, sullenly and wearily. He could speak out his mind at any rate, if Lawrence failed to do so; and Mr. Sondes had come to that state of health, mental and bodily, when it seems pleasant to hear any one utter every word his heart has in it, when reserve assumes the form of a vice instead of a virtue; when self-restraint and a constitutional constraint appear faults to mourn over, rather than gifts to admire.

All this passed, more swiftly than I can write it, through Mr. Sondes' mind; then he rose, and laying his hand on Percy's shoulder, said, with a tremor in his voice, —

— "Forbes, you would not have married a woman who did not love you?"

"I would have made her love me," Percy answered. "I would have loved her so much, she could not have helped giving me back some portion in time. But what is the use of talking about all that now?" he added. "It is all past and gone; the story is written — the book closed — the song sung; your niece is married, and I am —— not going to make an idiot of myself again," he finished abruptly.

For a moment there was silence, which Percy broke

by pulling a cigar out of his case, and cutting the end deliberately off it, remarking, as he did so, —

"I am not certain that there is not more comfort to be had out of a cigar than out of a wife. Now, Mr. Sondes, you wanted to know something. You came here to-night to talk to me. I am sane again, and ready to listen to all you may have to tell."

"I should like first to tell you how grieved I am ——"

"Don't, then," interrupted Percy. "I am one of those men whom sympathy does not suit — with whose mental constitution pity does not agree. It is bad for me even to grieve for myself. Forget my folly and my disappointment, and trust me with your present anxiety, if you will."

"It is natural I should be anxious," replied Mr. Sondes. "I am a dying man, Forbes, and ——"

"So are we all," remarked Percy, parenthetically.

"Yes; but I have a specific disease, remember; and that fact I shall not be able to keep much longer from the knowledge of Olivine and her husband."

"I consider it most undesirable that you should keep it from them at all," observed Percy; "and, what is more, I have always thought so."

"There are reasons," answered Mr. Sondes.

"I never knew a sick man yet who did not think he had weighty reasons for secrecy," persisted Percy; "but the reasons were generally none the better for that. However," he went on, "I do not wish to argue the matter with, or to press disagreeable disclosures on, you. In my opinion, your chance of recovery would be much greater were you to take your niece and Barbour into your confidence, as you have taken

me. But then I am no doctor. I only know what I should do under similar circumstances."

"You do not," retorted Mr. Sondes; "a person in sound health can never tell what he would do if he had a mortal disease — just as a man who is not put in the way of temptation cannot tell how he might act were he in circumstances of danger."

"Your simile tells against yourself," answered Percy, coolly. "The man who is not in temptation would best be able to tell his fellow standing on the brink, of the peril of his position; and, in like manner, the healthy see that half the secrecy and scruples of the sick are merely the fancies of disease. However, as I said before, I am no doctor; and though I shall be very glad when Barbour knows all about the nature of your illness, I am not going to give him a hint on the subject."

"If Barbour knew that my life was absolutely hanging on a straw, he would at once begin calculating how soon he could hope to fill my shoes."

"What a comfortable idea you seem to have of Barbour's disinterestedness," observed Percy.

"I think I understand human nature pretty well," said Mr. Sondes."

"I always notice people who understand human nature, never believe there is any good side to it," was Mr. Forbes' commentary on this statement.

"Had we better talk this matter over some future time?" asked his visitor. "It seems to me you are not much inclined to discuss it."

"Frankly, I am not," replied Percy. "Barbour is no favourite of mine; but still I do not believe him to be mercenary, and there is something treacherous to

my mind in the idea of imputing such a confoundedly sordid nature to a man behind his back. He is able and willing to work. I think, and have always thought, that, as regards money matters, your niece is perfectly safe in his hands."

"And, as regards other matters, Forbes?"

"He has behaved as well as any person could," answered Percy. "He has kept himself out of the way; he has not gone to Hereford Street when she was there. If you put him in the way of temptation, is that his fault? If you throw him in the way of as false a woman and as heartless a flirt as ever breathed, and give him no chance of escaping from her toils, is he to blame whatever happens? Is he — Mr. Sondes, I put it to your own common sense —"

"Then you think he is still fond of her? You believe there is danger in the association?"

Percy Forbes took the cigar from his mouth, and holding it between the first and second fingers of his right hand, looked at the person who asked this question, in almost incredulous amazement; there was that expression in his face which caused Mr. Sondes somewhat angrily to demand an answer.

"My God!" exclaimed the younger man; "how can you have lived all your life not to know that as well as I do? If any one else had made such a speech, I should have thought he was trying to make game of me. Do you think he ever ceased being fond of her? Do you think he is a stick or a stone, that he can go on avoiding her for ever? There is your peril, Mr. Sondes. It is not a money-danger — not a misfortune which can be averted by settlements or wills, or making him dependent on his wife. Help him, for heaven's

sake, to help himself; and keep that woman away from Stepney Causeway, as Barbour has been trying to keep himself away from Hereford Street. And beyond all things, Mr. Sondes, don't be angry with him — because he is only human. He did not deceive you — he deceived himself; and if you can only have patience, he will some day love Olivine far better than he ever loved Etta Alwyn."

Like one stunned, Mr. Sondes sat quiet, while this torrent of words poured over him.

It was the horror which had been stealing towards him, clothed with a tangible body — it was the dread made manifest — the terror put into shape.

"What have I done?" he muttered, in a dull, stupid kind of way. "What have I done?" And so he maundered on for a minute or two — till, stretching out his hands towards Percy, in a kind of mute appeal for help, he cried — "Oh Forbes! the pain!"

CHAPTER IX.

Opinions Medical and Otherwise.

When Percy Forbes thought in the after time about the night Mr. Sondes' mortal malady took a visible form before him, and tried to recollect how he raised the sick man, and bore him into the next apartment, and laid him on the bed, and administered such palliatives as his visitor prayed for — Memory refused to repeat the scene for him, no matter how earnestly he wooed her to do so.

There are some incidents — trivial, useless, to our thinking, to remember — which the mind will persist

in depicting over and over again; whilst others — as to how our strength and our will sufficed to serve a man; how we spoke under the influence of strong agitation; what we said when moved either by grief or by joy; in what words we expressed our sympathy or our disapproval — we can no more recall than we can the look of our own faces in childhood, the tones of our voices in the days that are now so far away.

In these matters the jade Memory, when we think we are most sure of her compliance with our desires, plays us false. She slips and slides away; she is a jilt, a torment, to our thinking a trifler, who discourses to us about the small troubles of our lives, and can never be got to stand still and answer sensibly when we would discourse to her concerning weightier matters.

There are hours fully spent, and abundantly occupied at the time, which yet to our subsequent ideas seem blanks, leaves lost out of the book of existence, simply because Memory will furnish us with nothing beyond the very vaguest summary of events that have been crowded into them.

Such an hour the one following Mr. Sondes' attack appeared to Percy Forbes. He could never, as I have said before, give a perfectly clear account even to himself of how he occupied the minutes as they fled by. Vaguely, perhaps, he understood the road of his life took a turn at that point (a man can feel the sweep of the curve even though he be travelling by express), but of the accessories, of the trees and the houses, the grass, the flowers, the bare common, the weary hill, the dusty thoroughfare, and the flints, and the stones,

and the sharp gravel, he took no heed, even unconsciously.

The road took a turn abruptly, and the end drew a little nearer, and the probable aspect of the end changed — that was all!

Well as he was able, Percy alleviated the agony of that terrible attack. He sent a messenger off for a great West-end doctor, skilled in the particular disease which had, as he knew, selected Olivine's uncle for a victim whom it delighted to honour with constant marks of attention and remembrance; he despatched a note to Lawrence, begging him to "come round," directly he returned home; he stayed beside the man in his hour of mortal agony, and as he stayed and watched, with the windows flung wide — though it was a cold raw winter's night — he thought about how this complaint had brought them together; how it had been the tie between him and Mr. Sondes.

For it was the tie. One day when Percy Forbes chanced to be passing through a street, once very familiar to him, but which he now seldom traversed, he met Mr. Sondes coming out of the house of that great doctor of whom mention has just been made, — met him so suddenly that the older man had no time to put on his mask; met him so fully face to face that the one countenance asked, and the other answered, without a word being uttered on either side.

Straight out from the presence-chamber into the street Mr. Sondes had walked — from that apartment furnished with the inevitable furniture, tenanted by that inevitable individual who for the time being represented Fate — he came from hearing of death and darkness into light and sunshine.

But the horror lay across his face still, and Percy Forbes perceived it. A physician who sees a score of patients every morning may not think it peculiarly distressing to intimate to one of them there can be no cure; but it is everything to the man who thus hears his doom.

After all, it is the shipwreck of his vessel — his vessel, and the only one he owns; it is the closing of his theatre; the announcement of his bankruptcy; the end of his day to that solitary individual.

The nineteen may live, and the twentieth is but an unit; the many go to their work and to their pleasure, — what matters the one who is left for execution? He has had his toy, and Time has broken it; of what more avail can the pieces, broken and scattered, prove to him or to any of his fellows?

"You have heard bad news, I fear?" Percy said, with Mr. Sondes' arm drawn through his, with Mr. Sondes staggering alongside him.

"Yes," was the answer; and then the sick man told him all he had just listened to from lips that rarely pronounced an erroneous opinion. "I prayed for the truth, and I have heard it," he went on; "and now I have heard it, I find the truth as hard to bear as my neighbours."

But Percy was hopeful; the mere fact of a disease being incurable did not, in his eyes, render it fatal. Doctors, moreover, always made the worst of things; if they did not, what would be the use of them?

"It is far easier to live than to die, Mr. Sondes," finished Percy; "and far pleasanter. In twelve months' time you will be laughing at all this, and wondering you were ever affected by such old women's tales."

"Old women's tales are pathetic, when there is an eternal truth underlying the story," was the reply; "and doctors' words affect a man when he understands clearly that they are his death-warrant."

But still Percy refused to be convinced. Under the sunshine he talked hopefully; under the sunshine Mr. Sondes felt his spirits improve, his hopes revive.

That was the tie which first drew the pair together; and as the days went by, Percy came fully to understand how much the fact of two people knowing something which is not known by the remainder of the world goes to make friends out of the most unlikely materials. Mr. Sondes never told any one else exactly how ill he was; but if he suddenly paused in the middle of a sentence, or if his laugh stopped abruptly, Percy Forbes knew the why and the wherefore of the pause and the sadness, guessed the thought which was passing through his mind, understood that in the noontide he was thinking of night, in the light of the darkness.

They had never been more than mere ordinary acquaintances until Percy learned that Mr. Sondes was suffering from a terrible disease, and that for his disease there could be found no cure; but from the time he met the sick man coming out from judgment, with his face white and his hand shaking like the hand of one palsied, they made rapid strides into friendship.

Not that he could keep back the disease, or give the sufferer relief; but HE KNEW, and there is a strange and subtle sense of something almost like security in touching occasionally the hand of any individual who is acquainted with the nature of our trouble.

He could talk freely to Percy; tell him of his fears

for Olivine, his vague plans for her better security after his death. During the time when Lawrence and his wife were abroad, many and many a conversation did the twain hold in the garden at Reach House, and in the library where Lawrence had been received on the occasion of his first visit to Stepney Causeway.

Bitter enough and sad enough were those conversations at times; but still they served to draw the two men closer together, and to make Mr. Sondes at length almost love the individual whom he had at one period absolutely disliked.

All this ground Percy reviewed as he stood, with the keen night air blowing into the apartment, waiting for Lawrence, listening for the doctor.

"What will Olivine do? what will she say?" was the refrain of every mental sentence he uttered to himself.

"Am I to tell Barbour the nature of your attack or not?" he asked Mr. Sondes at last, when he heard the outer bell ring, and knew that one or other of the expected visitors had arrived.

"You may tell him," the sick man answered, and he turned his face and buried it in his pillow, while Percy went down-stairs to meet the new comer. There could be no use in attempting concealment any longer. He had played his game in secrecy so long as secrecy was possible; now he might throw down his cards, and let the world see them, for the game was virtually over.

"I happened to be finishing some experiments at Distaff Yard," Lawrence began, "and did not get your note till my return home. What is it?" He was standing in the hall, stamping the snow off his feet and shaking the flakes from his clothes as he spoke,

and did not look up until Percy asked him if it were snowing.

"Snowing? I should think it was! Flakes as big as penny-pieces, and a wind which cuts you through and through. What is the matter with Mr. Sondes?"

"A sudden attack," Percy answered. "I have sent for a doctor. Would you like some brandy, Barbour? — you seem so cold."

"Thank you, yes. I cannot afford time to be laid up. What doctor have you sent for? Reddy?"

"No, I did not think there was any use in troubling with him. One of the men is gone for Sherfield."

"The deuce he is!" Lawrence set the glass of brandy down again untasted, and turned to look in Percy's face. "What in the name of heaven made you send for Sherfield?" he inquired.

"Because Mr. Sondes has consulted him before."

"Oh!" he exclaimed, and after a pause added, "and now perhaps, as you know so much, you know also why he consulted him?"

"Because he wanted advice, I suppose," returned Percy, a little nettled at Lawrence's tone: "and because Sherfield is considered the best opinion in London about some cases."

"What cases?" inquired Lawrence.

"You had better ask him when he comes," answered Percy; and he was turning away, but Lawrence caught his arm.

"Don't let us quarrel about the matter, old fellow," he said. "It seems as though you have been taken into confidence to my exclusion. But that cannot be helped now. I suppose I was not worthy of trust," he

added, with a bitter laugh, and Percy could not help feeling his anger was natural.

"I never could see the necessity for mystery about the matter," he remarked; "but sick people will take their own way, oftentimes to their own hurt."

"Ay, and healthy people, too," acquiesced Lawrence, and he passed up the staircase, and walked through Percy's study, into the bed-room where Mr. Sondes lay.

"I should like to have Olivine near me," the sick man said. "Send for her, will you, Lawrence? Does she know I am ill?"

"No," Lawrence answered. "I did not like to tell her. She and Mrs. Gainswoode were talking together over the fire when I got back from the Refinery, and it seemed to me needless to say anything about your illness until I knew exactly what was the matter."

"Let her come," Mr. Sondes remarked, and then, but not until then, Lawrence realised how ill the speaker must be. A few hours before, and he would no more have thought of suffering Olivine to venture out on such a night than he would have thought of bidding her row a wherry across the Thames. Now, however, the lesser evil was swallowed up in the greater — her comfort in his yearning agony.

"I will go for her," Lawrence said, and Mr. Sondes uttered no word of dissent. He only lay still, while the wind blew cold and keen through the open window, and the snow fell more swiftly and in larger flakes on to the balcony, thinking of the approaching time when they should still be talking together in the firelight, while he was without in the cold; when they should still be pursuing the round of daily life, with its plea-

sures, its pains, its hopes, its disappointments, while he was wrapped in that slumber from which all the din of earth, its pomps and vanities, its successes, its trumpet-calls to fame, to struggle, to endurance, may never wake the sleeper.

Before Olivine and Lawrence returned, Dr. Sherfield arrived, saw the patient, wrote a prescription, and shrugged his shoulders when at length he and Percy stood together in one of the lower rooms.

"It is quite possible he may get over this attack," observed the great doctor, standing before the fire Percy had caused to be lighted when Mr. Sondes first mentioned his wish that Olivine should be sent for, and stretching out first one hand and then the other over the blaze. "It is quite possible. There is nothing, so far as I see, to prevent his doing so."

"But the next, doctor?" suggested Percy.

"When the next comes you need not send for me," was the reply; and Dr. Sherfield changed the programme of his entertainment by withdrawing his hands from the blaze, and putting his feet alternately on the fender, while he looked into the leaping flame and smiled, as though he and the fire had some pleasant secret in common between them.

It was a way the great man had, this of being able to disengage his mind from the patient upstairs, and allowing it to travel off after some exquisite case reported in "The Lancet," or a wonderful cure which he intended to put in the next chapter of his marvellous work on medicine.

He could come down from a sick room, and in two minutes forget as utterly all about patient and death, pain and suffering, sorrow and bereavement, as though

such things had no place in this prosaic, work-a-day world.

Some people were so unreasonable as to object to this as to a fault, while others maintained that all the time he appeared to be off on his mental travels, he was really giving his intensest consideration to the case.

Both opinions were wrong, however. Dr. Sherfield's indifference was not assumed, neither could it justly be considered a fault. Is a man to give his heart as well as his mind, his pity as well as his skill, to lacèrate his feelings as well as to write out a prescription, for twenty-one shillings current coin of the realm? Is it possible for any one to go on being "very sorry" for sufferer after sufferer; very sorry, that is, to the length of making the sufferer's troubles his? Shall a doctor be expected to go on declaring he is interested beyond all power of expression in case after case, as monthly nurses affirm they delight in the physical and mental peculiarities of each new baby which they swathe, and subject to tortures and indignities unutterable?

Each individual thinks his own disease, like his own sorrow, the worst and the most remarkable that ever was endured by poor humanity; and if it were not for the little drawback of expense, would keep a doctor to study its idiosyncrasies. If one of the multitude have but a touch of bronchitis, he is confident nobody ever before had bronchitis in precisely the same form, and is angry with his long-suffering medical attendant, who tells him the attack is nothing to signify.

But suppose the medical attendant catch a cold,

what then? The happy possessor of a bronchial affection pooh-poohs his affliction, and thinks that doctors do not endure illness with one half the resignation of their patients.

All of which goes to prove at once that there is no load so easy to bear as the pack which another man carries on his back, and that there was no earthly reason why Dr. Sherfield should make the ailments of the men and the women for whom he prescribed, his own.

"You might as rationally, madam, expect me to be laid up with small-pox if I went into a house where the disease was raging," he remarked, on one occasion, to a female malcontent. "I cure where I can; I palliate where cure is impossible; but I do not undertake to bemoan myself, and sit in sackcloth and ashes over every hopeless case, or to mourn for seven days when, in the ordinary course of nature, some one whom I have seen once, perhaps for ten minutes, departs this life."

The ordinary course of nature! that was the thing; Dr. Sherfield considered the ordinary course of nature disease at any period of existence, at any age.

The man had to die; what, therefore, was the use of making a fuss about it? With Mr. Sondes the question was not of life or death, but simply for how long a time death could be averted, life, hanging on a thread, sustained.

The man had to die: it was appointed to him that he must do so at some period sooner or later. Science had declared cure was impossible; therefore skill, like the Levite, passed by on the other side. Could struggling with the inevitable do any good? Could bringing a

doctor all the way from one of the streets off Piccadilly in such wretched weather, to so detestable a neighbourhood, through streets that were enough to give a man the horrors, compass any desirable end? No. For which reason Dr. Sherfield told Percy it was useless to send for him again in case of any fresh attack.

If a prawn were to turn round and address a remonstrance to the cook about to pop it into boiling water, naturally the cook would feel surprise, and possibly indignation.

Now, to Dr. Sherfield, his patients were all prawns; some were to be cast back into the sea of life; others were to die. He had strong opinions on this subject, and felt little hesitation about expressing them; but if any one finds fault with him for this, I pray that person to remember a disinterested, unbiassed judgment is worth a hundred, warped and twisted. Truth is truth, and, therefore wholesome, let its taste be never so bitter, its flavour never so unpleasant. Percy Forbes, standing at the end of the mantel-shelf, and looking in the face of the great man, who confessed his skill had found its limits, felt that the honest sour, unpleasant though it might be to swallow, was preferable to the lying sweets of many a more complaisant doctor. And yet, all the time, his heart was hungering for some word of comfort, for some hopeful sentence which he could repeat to her over whom his soul was crying, in tenderest compassion, "Olivine, Olivine!"

"You will not be able to remove him for some weeks," remarked Dr. Sherfield, returning from the mental excursion in which he had been indulging himself to the Isle of Dogs and the patient he had been seduced thither to see. "And if he have, as he hinted,

worldly affairs to settle, I should suggest that the sooner he arranges those kind of matters, the better for him and all parties concerned. Has he a large family?"

"Never was married," answered Percy.

"Indeed! I fancied he was a widower; now what can have given me that impression?"

"He has a niece," Percy remarked; "if he mentioned her at all to you, he would be certain to speak of her as his child."

"That was it," said Dr. Sherfield, nodding to the fire as though satisfied. "Is she single?"

"No; married," replied Mr. Forbes, and there was a tone in his voice which made the doctor turn his eyes from the fire and fasten them on his face.

"It will be rather inconvenient for you to have a sick man thrown on your hands after this fashion," suggested Dr. Sherfield, who had taken a liking to Percy, just as the house surgeon at St. George's had taken a liking to him the day he and Lawrence Barbour became acquainted.

"I shall leave the place to them till Mr. Sondes is able to be removed," answered the master of Reach House, hurriedly. "A bachelor, you know," he added next moment, "can make shift anywhere."

"And who will take charge of the invalid?" asked Dr. Sherfield.

"His niece Mrs. Barbour, and her husband."

"It is very kind of you, I am sure," remarked the physician, and he resumed his contemplation of the fire, only to be diverted from that occupation next moment by the entrance of Olivine, who, dazzled by the light, did not at first perceive the doctor, and

advanced towards Percy with her hands stretched out, just as her uncle had extended his, not four hours before, asking for help as he had done.

"Oh! Mr. Forbes, what is it? How good you are. Where can I find him?"

She could not see when she began her sentence, because she was blinded by the light; she could not see when she concluded it, because her eyes were full of tears, tears that would brim over and roll fast down her cheeks. "And Mrs. Gainswoode insisted on coming, too," she added, "and I am so sorry; but, Mr. Forbes, I could not help it."

"This is Mrs. Barbour, doctor," Percy interrupted; he had one of Olivine's hands in his, and forced her to turn and notice Dr. Sherfield before proceeding further with her speech.

"And how is my uncle?" she said, fastening at once on the physician, who seemed to her at that moment the incarnation of hope and help, and air and sunshine. "You will be able to cure him; he is not very ill; he will soon be well?" in answer to which Dr. Sherfield, who had at first commenced with a stiff bow and an increased conviction she was much more friendly with Mr. Forbes than he saw any occasion for, took the hand Percy had released, and answered, "My dear young lady, we must hope for the best; there is no doubt but that with your good nursing, he will recover from this attack; but his illness cannot fail to prove tedious; you will not be so impatient if I tell you this at once."

"No, oh no!"

"And he must not be agitated."

"He is accustomed to me," she said, softly.

"Accustomed! I should think he was," remarked Mrs. Gainswoode, who joined the group at this juncture; "you will kill yourself, child, if you go on as you have been doing lately. Now let me help you; I am a capital nurse, and as for falling asleep, I assure you, Doctor Sherfield, I believe I could keep awake for ever."

And she made one of her sweeping little curtseys to the physician, who froze up on the instant, and observing that he thought it must be considered a talent wasted, glanced first at Mrs. Gainswoode, and then at Olivine, and then at Mrs. Gainswoode again, critically.

"I will take another look at our patient now," he volunteered, rather to Percy's astonishment, and with a bow to Mrs. Gainswoode, and a kindly good-bye to Olivine, he left the room.

"Is that another niece?" he inquired, as he and Percy ascended the stairs together.

"No, she is not any relation; she is a lady who has been staying on a visit with Mrs. Barbour."

"Stylish-looking person," remarked Dr. Sherfield.

"Yes," answered Percy; and that was all the physician made out of his last move.

"You will recollect what I said about his worldly affairs," he said, while he stood buttoning his coat in the hall, and putting on his gloves, and looking into his hat, as though there were some mystery concealed in it.

"I shall not forget," Percy answered.

"And I need not come down again; but you can let me know how he is; and if, at any time, it would be a satisfaction, I will just take a look at him."

With which concession Dr. Sherfield departed, but

not before he had quite decided there was more in that household than met the eye; and he would have been still further confirmed in this opinion had he overheard a short dialogue which took place between Lawrence Barbour and Percy Forbes, before his carriage had reached the West India Dock gates and was dashing back along the Commercial Road to London.

"Will you let bygones be bygones, Forbes?" Lawrence began. "I am sorry for all I said the other day. I did not mean the half of it; but I was put out, and you chose the wrong time for giving me so much advice."

"A man always does, when he tells his neighbour he has too many irons in the fire," was the quiet reply.

"Well, perhaps so," answered Lawrence; "but in any case let us cry quits. You are a thorough good fellow, and I will not quarrel again with you, if I can help it."

"Nor I with you," Percy agreed; but there was a second feeling in the minds of both men as they grasped hands.

"I must keep fair with him at all hazards," Lawrence mentally decided; while Percy, occupying the same spot on the hearthrug where Dr. Sherfield had stood, came to the conclusion that Barbour was making too sure of Mr. Sondes' property before that gentleman departed to the only land where a large money capital is not supposed to be needed in order to secure social consideration, profound respect, and unutterable happiness!

CHAPTER X.

Lawrence and Percy.

NEXT day the owner of Reach House removed himself and a few of his effects to Mrs. Pratting's first-floor, to those rooms wherein Lawrence Barbour had, at an earlier period of this story, surrounded himself with the "gobbelets" and carpet, the chairs covered in "Geneva" velvet, the sprawling Cupids, and the gim-cracks, which excited at once Mrs. Jackson's admiration and animadversion.

When Lawrence changed his state and his home, he took those various belongings with him to Stepney Causeway, and the vases and the statuettes lightened up the old drawing-room where he had sung to Olivine in the semi-darkness, and the various trifles which he had purchased, in order to make his rooms look as much like *her* rooms as possible, now went to beautify a house, presided over by Olivine Sondes, instead of by Etta Alwyn.

Only the French lithograph found no place on any of the walls. It lay, face downwards, at the bottom of a large packing-case, with much of that useless rubbish piled above it which a man accumulates in the course of time, and keeps he knows not why, for some indefinite use in a remote future.

Long afterwards Olivine found the lithograph there; and, when she found it, she propped the picture up on her knees, by passing her arms behind it, and looked into the eyes that languished back at her from the frame, till her own were dim, till face and neck, and

hair and trick of expression were all like a confused mist before her. While she sat thus preoccupied, one entered the apartment, who took the picture from her, and, placing it on the floor, set his heel on the glass, and breaking it into a hundred pieces, stamped the beauty and the likeness, and the form and the colour, out of that fair, false face.

"Olivine, my darling," he said, "did we not agree that bygones were to be bygones?" and he gathered up the fragments of frame and portrait, and piled them on the fire.

"Yes; but I found it," was the answer; "and I could not help feeling sorry."

"You will never feel sorry about anything concerning her again, I trust," he replied; and the leaping flame curled round the frame, and the fire consumed the picture.

That time had all to come, however, when Percy Forbes transferred his quarters to Mrs. Pratting's rooms, which were plainly enough furnished to have satisfied even Mrs. Jackson's economical tendencies.

Half-a-dozen chairs, a much-worn drugget-carpet, a couple of China shepherdesses, moreen curtains, a stand of flowers executed in cut paper, a Pembroke table, a sofa covered in haircloth, and suggestive of the extremest unrest, were all the objects wherewith Percy was expected to feast his eyes and refresh his soul.

Anything duller than the rooms, the house, the situation, and the weather, could scarcely be imagined; but Percy was indifferent to one as to another. He was martyrizing himself for Olivine's sake, and a man is but a poor lover who does not rather enjoy wetting

his own feet, in order that the lady of his choice may cross the ford dry.

This is the only sort of chivalry permitted to nineteenth-century cavaliers; and perhaps it is as true chivalry to bear discomfort pleasurably and in silence, to the end that the loved one may not be deprived of her accustomed luxuries, as it was to run a tilt at the sound of trumpets in the days when heroines were called Edelgitha and Rowena.

Not that Percy's self-imposed penance proved agreeable to Olivine; rather the reverse, indeed. She and her husband and Mrs. Gainswoode all entreated him with much earnestness, and a profusion of words not to leave Reach House; but the master thereof was inexorable.

"He knew Mrs. Barbour ought to have the place to herself and her uncle," he observed, glancing somewhat significantly at Mrs. Gainswoode. "Besides," he added, "my hours and my ways are not the hours and ways suited for an invalid: I should only be uncomfortable myself, and make every one else in the house uncomfortable also."

"Then go to Stepney Causeway," Olivine suggested, eagerly.

"Do," followed Mrs. Gainswoode, "and I will return there and make your coffee for you."

"Ah! madam," he said, bowing low, "I could never put you to such vile uses."

"You cannot think the pleasure it would give me," she answered.

"Pray have mercy!" he exclaimed. "Remember what a lonely man I am, and do not drive me to

distraction by placing before mine eyes the prospect of a bliss I may never realise."

"Really, Percy, you are too absurd," remarked Mrs. Gainswoode. "I should have thought we were too old for any absurdity of that kind."

"I should have thought so, too," answered Mr. Forbes; whereupon Etta bit her lip, and colouring up a little, declared he was as great a teaze as ever.

"That is only your kind partiality," observed Percy.

"I wish she would go to make coffee for anybody," said Olivine, the first moment she found herself alone with Percy.

"For me?" he suggested. "Surely you would not be so cruel as to wish anything of the kind."

"Why, do you not like her?" asked Mrs. Barbour.

"Do not you?" he retorted, and there was a moment's silence. "I am devoted to her!" he went on, finding the silence irksome, — "so much so that I really could not endure to see her perform a single kindness for me."

"I wish she would go — I do wish she would," Olivine broke out, passionately.

"Really, truly, you say that, not as a mere passing wish, but from your very heart?"

"From the bottom of my heart, Mr. Forbes; and if she goes now, I will never ask her to return — never;" and Mrs. Barbour's eyes sparkled as she spoke.

Percy Forbes laughed. "You dear women!" he said; "how charmingly inconstant, how deliciously changeable you are, — the bosom friend of to-day is the bitter enemy of a month hence. Talk about men!

Believe me, Mrs. Barbour, not being of the same mind for a week at a time is the prerogative of your sex."

"Perhaps so;" and she stood, bringing home the general proposition to her own experience, instead of arguing from her own experience to a general proposition. "Do you not think," she said at last, raising her eyes from the carpet, "that if this be as you declare, it is so, simply because we love what we fancy, and dislike what we know?"

"My dear Mrs. Barbour," laughed Percy; "will you pardon my remarking that your way of expressing yourself is exceedingly vague, and unintelligible to ordinary comprehensions."

"How tiresome you are," she pouted; "you know quite well what I mean; we think people are good, and kind, and truthful, and then when we find they are not —"

"You visit your disappointment on them; in fact, detest your old friends for falling short of a standard they never professed to be able to reach. Woman's justice, is it not, to punish a person for the vagaries of your own imagination?"

"You are very unkind," she returned; "very, for you know perfectly well what I mean, and whom I mean, and who seemed at one time very different to what she is now; and you are of my opinion, if you would only confess. Now, are you not?"

"I never confess," he answered; "and further, I do not want to know what you mean, or who you mean, or anything about anybody. Remember that it is safer for me not to know — for me to remain in utter ignorance; it is indeed."

And Percy looked at Olivine, and she looked back at him as he uttered these words; then she bowed her head slowly, and as it sank lower and lower, the blood mounted into her face, and covered cheek, and brow, and throat with a burning blush.

Gentle though she might be, that blush was to the full, one as much of anger as of pain and shame.

What right had he to rebuke her for the half-confidence she reposed in him? How dare he even imply that she was going to say anything against her husband? If she chose to dislike Etta Gainswoode, she would dislike her, and express the feeling. Every one knew Mrs. Gainswoode was a flirt; that is, every one except a few — she would tell Percy Forbes what she thought of his speech and his warning: and it is probable she might have carried this idea into execution, but that when she lifted her head again she found Percy had gone.

He took good care the subject was not discussed again: to Mrs. Gainswoode he evinced as much courtesy and paid quite as much attention as to Olivine; but yet, when at the end of four days Mr. Gainswoode came down to the Isle of Dogs, in a state bordering on distraction, and insisted that his wife should at once return with him to Hereford Street and nurse — "if you must nurse some one," was Mr. Gainswoode's pleasant way of putting matters — the future heir of Mallingford, in preference to a man who may be ill of anything, — "small-pox, or fever, or — or leprosy," finished her husband, whose ideas on the subject of disease were of the very vaguest description — Olivine could not help thinking that she was very probably indebted to Percy for this good office.

Mrs. Gainswoode at first thought so, too, apparently, for she never rested till she ascertained how her husband became informed of Mr. Sondes' illness.

"I am certain I never told you," she remarked.

"No," was the reply; "I heard it from Lord Lallard — and he heard it from old Barbour."

"Oh!" thought Etta — and as it never occurred to her that old Barbour had heard the news from anyone excepting his son, she felt angry with Lawrence accordingly.

"It will be much pleasanter for me to be in Hereford Street," she said, with a sweet smile; "only I thought it was my duty to remain and help that dear, sweet Olivine, if I could."

"Duty, like charity, begins at home," growled Mr. Gainswoode; and Etta, being conscious she had not made so thorough a beginning at home as could be desired, refrained from replying that, like charity, also, it did not end there. And thus she departed from Reach House, to re-visit that pleasant habitation no more.

In those days, however, Olivine did not find it a particularly cheerful residence. No house, perhaps, ever does seem cheerful when sickness is sojourning within, even though the warm summer sun is shining down upon it; and in the dull time of the year, with snow on the ground, with sleet falling aslant the landscape, with the trees standing brown and bare against the dull leaden sky — with life and death fighting ott their battle hour after hour — Olivine thought she had never been in such a miserable, wretched place in the whole of her short existence.

Further, she was satisfied she had never felt so unhappy before — and that she never could feel so unhappy again.

If the troubles of early life bear no proportion to the sorrows of later years, their want of absolute magnitude is more than counterbalanced by the power of the glass through which youth regards them.

After all, suffering is just as people take it, and the griefs of one time of existence are, like the diseases of childhood, difficult to endure — not because either the griefs or the diseases are serious, but simply because they are considered so. Is the mortal sickness of age one-half so hard to bear as the feverish attack of childhood? Do the troubles wherewith man's fine estate is mortgaged ever seem so terrible, so impossible to endure, as the petty trials over which young hearts are like to break — over which such tears are shed as never fall from aged eyes, that have looked on death, that are dimmed with watching, that are dulled by pain, by sorrow, and by time.

Mercifully, the capacity of suffering is blunted as the years go by, the mental nerves lose their sensitiveness, the mind, like the body, grows hard, and the agony of to-day will be the passing annoyance of a twelvemonth hence. The actual separation is felt to be less insufferable than the earlier horror, and dread of death. Life's troubles come and are borne, and are forgotten — the swift stroke falls, and the man lives through it — the keen thrust goes home — and though when the weapon is withdrawn, it is covered with blood that has been drawn from the very veins of his heart, yet the sufferer does not turn him from the battle — he never flinches from the world's strife,

from the world's hurry, and rush, and bustle, and in the excitement of the warfare he takes no note of having been so grievously wounded — in the charge, in the repulse, in the fierce attack, he remembers his sorrow no more.

But trouble of any kind was new to Olivine, and she did not take to it naturally. The long struggling sickness, the weary night-watches, the days without amendment, the mornings and afternoons when the rain poured down ceaselessly, or the snow lay without on the ground, while she sat in that still room all alone, so far as sympathy or companionship went, seemed to her insupportable.

The hammering in the ship-yard grew to be intolerable, the look of the bare and leafless trees mournful in the extreme. Lawrence could not be much at Reach House. Of Percy she saw little, or nothing. "How I wish he had not gone," she was wont to sigh; but Percy knew what was best in the matter, and, keeping himself out of the way of temptation, left the house free for Olivine to do as she liked in it.

"Shall you not be glad, Lawrence," she asked her husband, "when we get back to Stepney Causeway?"

"That I will," he answered; "it is such a deuce of a way from here to the City."

"What do you want to be continually going into the City for?" Olivine inquired.

"Business," was the reply with which his wife had to rest satisfied.

There are various kinds of businesses which a man may find to take him into the City; but of these only two are now necessary to be specified — legitimate

and illegitimate — one connected with his regular trade, and another that has no sort of concern with it. Almost by accident Percy Forbes had discovered Lawrence's frequent visits to various courts and lanes, and yards, west of Gracechurch Street were to be attributed rather to speculations utterly unconnected with either the chemical works or the sugar-house, than arising in any way from his position in those establishments; but Olivine remained in absolute ignorance of this fact.

She, in her innocence, thought that Goodman's Fields required his incessant supervision — that Mr. Perkins was but a child in Distaff Yard without the constant counsel and assistance of her husband.

Concerning business Olivine knew literally nothing; she was as totally in the dark about her husband's operations, as though his trade had been in Canada, and she still a resident in London.

Any excuse he thought proper to make for his eternal absences, was regarded by Olivine like a revelation from on high. What did she know about shares and companies? about enormous fortunes being made in a few weeks? about the express trains, which were to supersede all the old stage-coaches on the road to fortune? about the great man her husband meant to become? about the fine lady she was to be metamorphosed into, when the ships he and his friends were trying to float had made their voyages, and reached their destined harbours in safety?

Those were the palmy days of limited liability and unlimited speculation; those were the days in which people prophesied that a business millennium was at hand; in which thousands were made and lost; in which the beggars out of the streets, the men who had

a twelvemonth before scarcely a shoe to their foot, certainly not half-a-crown in their pockets, were mounted on horseback, and, fulfilling the old proverb, rode literally to the devil.

In its way, that time was like the time of the railway mania. The individual who, in threadbare coat and patched boots, and no linen to speak of, except a very conspicuous shirt-collar, borrowed five shillings from his more responsible acquaintance to-day, and gave an I O U for the same on a piece of paper two inches square, bowled past the lender of that crown a month afterwards in a phaeton and pair, or received him with overpowering condescension in offices furnished according to the latest fashion, with board-room-table of carved oak, chairs upholstered in leather, curtains of the richest materials, and bookcase manufactured by Gillow.

This individual was but the type of a class of men who, having each and all some patent, good or bad, for sale, sold it, and were installed as managers of the companies formed to work such patents. A year previously he was grateful if a friend stopped to speak to him in the street; he kept to the back thoroughfares; he had an uncertain and eternally varying address; he could barely afford omnibus fares; he lived, God knew how; for certainly no fellow-being, unless it might be a much-enduring wife, was in his confidence; but when once the Limited Liability Act was passed, the grub changed into a chrysalis, the chrysalis into a butterfly, with its hunters in the country, its yacht at Southampton, its house in town, its villa on the banks of the Thames, its French cook, its rare

wines, its box at the opera, its brougham, its forcing pits and its vineries.

Heavens! it was a merry life, if it could but have lasted. Happy would the human butterfly have been if at the end of its brilliant season it could have fluttered out of life, and cut the world when the financial crisis arrived, and the company collapsed, and the sheriff's officers came to take possession, and the horses were sold, and the town and country house, and the wild excitement of that mad time passed away like a dream.

Oh! ye sober plodders, who have seen all this and wondered; who have thought it at times a little hard that such an one should splash the mud upon you from his chariot-wheels; who have writhed under his patronising manner, and felt envious, it may be, because of the terms of easy intimacy on which he appeared to be with my Lord This, and Sir Somebody That — open your cash-box, and lift the tray, and turn over the papers that have lain there for many a day! There is the I O U you knew was only so much waste paper at the time you accepted it, which has been hidden there through the days of his adversity and of his prosperity likewise. Slowly you tear the paper across and thrust it into the fire; the man has been down, the man has been up, and he is down again, whilst you are where you stood at first; better perhaps a little, but certainly not any the worse. He is wearing out the broadcloth of his prosperity now in adversity; but he will soon pawn that, and come down once again to the buttoned-up coat, to the wisp of black handkerchief, to the miraculous shirt-collar, to the patched boots, to the house-side of the thoroughfares, to the back streets, to the

low eating-houses, to the public-houses frequented by carriers and cabmen, where he will thankfully take a treat from you if you are inclined to be generous.

The days of "Limited Liability" are not all spent yet — but there were worse days in the early period of its history, even, than those in which our present lot is cast — when the devil of speculation was loosed in order to deceive the nations; when small capitalists were snuffed out by great companies; when only honest men were ever again to be poor; when the rogues had entered into their temporal heaven; when everybody one met was going to make his fortune either by shares, by promoting, by selling his inventions, by lending his name, by procuring noblemen as directors, by starting projects, by advertising the company, or by helping to float it off the stocks.

The cholera and Limited Liability reached a point at about the same period. The same post that brought newspapers containing the Registrar-General's report to quiet country districts, brought likewise unwonted-looking letters enclosing samples of all manner of new fabrics, prospectuses of wonderful companies, forms of application for shares, moderate calculations of the thousand per cent. returns to be expected, and such flourishing statements, combined with such lists of names, as caused Paterfamilias to place his spectacles on his honoured nose and peruse the document with much interest and astonishment.

There were companies for everything — for banking, for dining, for driving, for drinking, for bathing, and burying, and clothing, and washing, and furnishing.

No person who has not studied the statistics of companies can have the faintest idea of the deluge which

came upon the earth for its wickedness when once Parliament opened the sluice-gates by doing away with Unlimited Responsibility. The thing was never thought of or imagined by man which did not, in the days of which I am speaking, find some one to make it into a body, with a tail of secretaries, directors, solicitors, brokers, bankers, managers, agents — what you will.

There was a story told long ago of a simple-minded clergyman, who, being asked by his publisher how many copies he wished to have printed of a particular sermon, went into a calculation of the number of towns and villages in England, and then, estimating that each town and village would furnish one customer, desired an edition of some hundreds of thousands to be struck off.

Companies in the first blush of limited liability were got up on precisely the same principle. Suppose, for example, it was the Consolidated Coffin Company: first of all you had in round numbers a statement of the annual deaths in Great Britain and Ireland; next, an impartial division of those numbers into adults and children; thirdly, a calculation of the cost of manufacture, and of the ordinary exorbitant charge for a very inferior article; fourthly, you had a sum in subtraction, and a sum in multiplication, thus — profit per coffin and consequent profit on a million of coffins; fifthly, the probable expenses of working the company were deducted from the probable returns of the company, the amount which had to be paid to Messrs. Steel and Crabbe, whose valuable patents the directors had secured — as well as the said patents being, the one for a new screw, and the other for a mode of running the sides of the coffin into grooves, thereby avoiding the unsightliness and expense of nails; and the public ap-

petite, having by this time been sufficiently whetted, the percentage to be expected was then declared, and the project confidently submitted to the nation. It is but justice to state that the nation amply deserved the confidence reposed in it, and nobly responded to the demands made upon its credulity. From east and west, from north and south, applications for shares flowed in. People thought in those days they could not get their letters posted fast enough, and were always dreading that all the shares would be allotted before their epistles could reach London.

The South Sea scheme will be longer remembered than the mania for companies which followed the passing of the Limited Liability Act; but the reason why the one remains in men's memories while the other has left comparatively little impression on the public mind, is solely because the first concentrated itself in one gigantic bubble, while the second rose to the surface in a multitude of small foam-balls, the subsidence of which attracted comparatively little attention. The aggregate of the money lost was probably more in the one case than in the other; but then it did not take wings and fly away in so magnificent a manner. Some future historian, writing of that time when England lost its brains for a season, and went mad about impossibilities, may perhaps get together the statistics of the rotten companies, and tell how many collapsed, how many were wound up, how many were swindles, how many were floated into the commercial river to the end that promoters and agents and secretaries and brokers and directors might pocket their honorarium, when the leaky ships were quietly permitted to sink; but no ordinary observer can form even an approximate idea of

the schemes that never paid a sixpence except to the men who started them, of the hundreds and hundreds of pounds each post brought from quiet country rectories, from widow ladies existing on small annuities, from spinsters earning a hard living as governesses and schoolmistresses, from struggling curates, from speculative squires, from all sorts and descriptions of people, who swallowed the bait as greedily as hungry fishes, and who feel the hook that bait covered tormenting them to this very day.

Everything except experience seemed in favour of these companies. It appeared feasible that co-operation should be better than individual exertion; that if a small capitalist were able to make a profit, a great capitalist, in the shape of a huge body composed of an infinite number of agreeing parts, should be able to pay handsome dividends to each shareholder in the concern. The whole programme, indeed, was perfect; only human experience protested against the idea of much ever being gained without an enormous amount of personal exertion, and declared schemes which promised such returns without trouble, or large individual expenditure, contained of necessity the germ of failure, and bore on their faces unmistakeable marks of jobbery, and fraud.

All men, however, refuse to believe the experience of others till that experience has been verified by their own; and therefore sensible men, wise and steady enough in the ordinary concerns of life, went mad, as I have said, at this juncture, and thought fortunes were to be made in an hour.

By accident, I repeat, Percy Forbes learned how Lawrence Barbour was mixed up with one of the ventures of that time; how he was wasting his time and

strength and money in assisting Mr. Alwyn (who, having got a "backer," had returned to Hereford Street) to form a board of directors, and get the company, in which they were mutually interested, well before the country.

Lawrence's name did not appear in the prospectuses, but his father's figured there instead; and at the time Percy Forbes ventured to remonstrate with Mr. Sondes' partner concerning his imprudence, the younger man was chafing over Lord Lallard's refusal to permit his name to appear on the direction.

So confident had Lawrence felt of his acquiescence that he promised Mr. Alwyn's backer faithfully to procure Lord Lallard's consent; and when he failed to fulfil that promise, naturally the capitalist said some hard things, to which Olivine's husband replied in kind. It was on the top of this interview Percy Forbes told him the project was not thought well of by good people, and advised him to wash his hands of companies altogether.

"You have got into a very good position, Barbour," finished Percy; "and if you take my advice you will not jeopardise it by mixing yourself up, with either Alwyn, or his friends."

Whereupon Lawrence told Percy "to mind his own business, and be hanged to him for an impertinent, officious sneak."

"You want me to remain a dependant and a beggar all my life, I suppose," he went on, gathering anger as he spoke. "With men making fortunes about me, you would like to see me droning away my youth as you are doing! I am sick of it; and you can go and tell Mr. Sondes so, if you like. My God! if one is

never to have money or leisure till one is old, what is the good of it? What is the use of being in the world at all, if it is to be work, work, work, for a bare subsistence — for enough merely to keep body and soul together."

"I should have thought you were making a good deal more than a bare subsistence," remarked Percy.

"Then I wish to Heaven you would quit thinking of me and my concerns at all," answered Lawrence. "I have had enough of your meddling. Manage your own business and leave mine alone. When I come and ask you for money, it will be time enough to give me advice. You have not made so much of your own chances that you can afford to throw stones at me. Considering I have made my way, and that yours has been made for you, I think the boot is pretty considerably on the other leg. When you do as well with your thousands as I have done with my noughts, you may preach if you like; but till then do not advise your betters."

"I cannot do that till I see them," was Percy's reply; and so the pair parted.

Whether Mr. Sondes guessed the nature of the business to which Lawrence devoted so much time, or whether some kind friend imparted the information to him, Percy Forbes could never decide; but the result was that the sick man finally resolved on making such arrangements as would, so he expressed it, protect the Sugar Refinery in the event of his death.

"I am not going to have the whole thing go to the dogs," he said to Percy, when he was at last able to sit up in bed and discourse about money matters. "If he likes to take his own way, he shall not take it with

my capital. Send for my lawyer. I want to have this anxiety off my mind; and tell Lawrence to return early this evening, for I want to speak to him particularly."

"I hope you will remember the doctor's caution, and not excite yourself," ventured Percy.

"I am not going to excite myself; but I mean to tell Lawrence my intentions with regard to the Refinery. I wish, Forbes, you would consent to what I proposed last night. Your uncle, I am certain, could be induced to meet your views."

"I cannot do it, sir," Percy said, a little stiffly.

"But why? What possible objection can you raise?"

"I should not like Barbour for a partner, and Barbour would not like me."

"But he should like you," retorted Mr. Sondes.

"Pardon me," answered Percy: "I think you are making a great mistake in this matter. Barbour is not a man to be driven — and excuse my saying that he deserves better treatment than to be driven. Some one has, I fear, been prejudicing you against him; but, believe me — whoever that some one may be — he is as little your friend as he is Barbour's."

"What would you have me do?" inquired Mr. Sondes, ignoring the latter portion of Percy's sentence.

"I would have you all pull together," answered Mr. Forbes. "One mind in a house is a great power for good. If you and Barbour could mutually agree on the most desirable course to be pursued, you would find it infinitely better than playing at cross-purposes, as you are doing. Be fair with him: tell him what you fear; and consult him as to the best means of

averting such a calamity. Beyond all, Mr. Sondes, remember his position cannot be a pleasant one."

"In what way?" asked the sick man.

"He is not his own master; and to one of his temper the *rôle* of submission must prove at times rather difficult."

"I will recollect that," said Mr. Sondes, wearily. "Send him to me early, if you happen to see him at Goodman's Fields."

But Percy preferred sending a messenger to risking a personal interview on such a subject. He desired to keep out of the affair altogether, and it was therefore with no little surprise, but rather with considerable annoyance, he beheld Lawrence enter his room about ten o'clock the same evening, and heard him say, "I have just had a talk with the governor, Forbes, and want to speak to you about it."

CHAPTER XI.

Lawrence Entreats.

"Sit down," said Percy Forbes, in reply to his visitor's observation, at the same time placing one of the uninviting chairs covered in hair-cloth near the fire, in a little nervous hurry which contrasted strangely with his usual careless, collected manner.

The two men seemed to have changed natures for the moment.

"Thank you, let me pull off my coat first," answered Lawrence, as coolly as possible; and he laid his rough pilot-cloth outer garment on the sofa, and put

his hat on the top of it, before he came forward and availed himself of Mrs. Forbes' politeness.

"It is awfully cold," he remarked, holding his hands over the fire and then rubbing them together; "and I don't know a walk I hate so much as that from Reach House here."

"I prefer Regent Street myself, certainly," answered Percy; "but these things are quite matters of taste."

"Yes," agreed Lawrence; and he sate looking into the blaze for a minute without making any further remark. Suddenly he lifted his eyes and, letting them range round the room, observed, "It seems strange to be sitting in the old place again with the old people gone."

"Old people, what do you mean?" inquired Percy, wonderingly.

"I mean the hopes and the fancies and the dreams that used to sit opposite to me as you are sitting now; I mean the people we create for ourselves, and who are more our companions than actual flesh and blood can ever prove; I mean the men and the women who walk through a door without opening it; I mean that — I am an egregious egotist," finished Lawrence abruptly, and he dropped his eyes on the fire once more.

There are some persons in the world who love whatever they pity: Percy Forbes' affections were very closely related to his sympathies.

At that moment he liked Lawrence Barbour better than he had ever done, because he pitied him with all his heart and soul, — pitied him for his despairing look round the room, which had once been so full of

happiness for him; where he had lived, while he loved with a hope of return; where he had worked for her sake, thought of her, borne the loss of her; — pitied him for his pale, worn face, for the anxious look in his eyes, for the fantastic confession he had just made.

The one man felt irresistibly attracted to the other in that hour. He knew Lawrence was not an individual who wore his heart on his sleeve, and he valued his spontaneous confidence accordingly. He had not expected that the interview would even have commenced with an approach to friendliness, and the turn the conversation had taken was therefore gratifying to him in the extreme.

But withal he experienced a difficulty in knowing exactly what to answer, and ventured in his extremity to say —

"You are looking fagged. Are you ill, or is it this wretched weather?"

"I am worried," was the reply. "Excepting that, I am as well as ever I need hope to be. Do you remember the first day that we met? I wish that day had never been!"

Now the way this sentence was constructed caused Mr. Lawrence Barbour's wish to appear personal; and imagining something of this kind, Percy Forbes discreetly held his tongue.

Glad enough he felt of his forbearance next moment, when Lawrence, raising his head, went on —

"I do not say that, because I met you then, old fellow. Years ago I read a story in some ancient periodical — Wilson's 'Tales of the Borders' I think it must have been — about a woman who, believing in

'first foots,' thought the first foot who crossed her threshold on New Year's morning unlucky, and behaved herself rudely towards that individual. The story is vague and shadowy in my memory; but it came upon me as I crossed the bridge that you were my first foot on the threshold of a new life, and that I had demeaned myself towards you after the fashion of the woman I speak of."

"I do not think you did," answered Percy; "but supposing it were so, what then?"

"I recollect asking you if you were my evil fate. I believe I have acted to you ever since as though you were something of the kind. To-night I began thinking that you might perhaps be my good fate. It may be. Will you try?" and Lawrence laid his hand on Percy's arm, while Percy, still nervous and constrained, asked,

"What do you want? what is it you require?"

"I will tell you," Lawrence answered. "Mr. Sondes begged me to return to Reach House early this evening, as you know, and I did return early. There he sat in your sanctum looking like a ghost; and it did not require any very great amount of faith to induce me to believe his first statement, which was to the effect that he had not very long to remain in this world, that his disease was incurable, that it resolved itself into a mere question of time, and that consequently he desired to set his temporal affairs in order. All this can be no news to you. He tells me you have been in his confidence since before my marriage."

Percy bowed his head in assent, and Lawrence proceeded. "Some one has been doing me a friendly turn with Mr. Sondes — telling him I have been cal-

culating on his death — telling him falsehoods. Till to-night I thought that some one was you, Forbes; but now I know it to have been our manager, who shall clear out of the Refinery to-morrow. This has nothing to do with the matter in hand, however. Mr. Sondes wants to place his niece beyond the power of adverse trade, and so proposes not to leave his share of the business either to her or me, but to sell out now, and invest his capital otherwise. He says he asked you to buy, but that you declined," Lawrence added;

And Percy answered, "I did."

"Well, I want you now to reconsider your decision," went on his visitor; "I want you to look at what we can offer, before you finally reject our proposition. It is a first-rate concern, it returns a handsome profit, it need involve no work to you unless you like, it is such an opportunity as might never present itself to you again."

"I have not the necessary capital," said Percy Forbes, decidedly.

"Mr. Sondes will be satisfied with twenty thousand pounds," suggested Lawrence.

"I have not more than ten thousand pounds clear in the world, and that is invested," persisted the other.

"Now, Forbes, look here," said Lawrence, decidedly; "let us be plain one with another. You have refused this partnership for three reasons, Mr. Sondes tells me: one, because your capital is locked up; another, because you would not like to be in business with me; and the third, because you think I should not like to be in business with you. Are we right so far?"

"Yes," agreed Forbes.

"Well, you mistake my feelings. Beyond all other men I should like to have you for my partner — beyond all other men, that is, except Perkins; and if you agree to change your business, I will do my best to make it comfortable for you."

"And why should I change my business?" demanded Percy Forbes.

"Because you are but a junior partner at the Reach Works; because you get but a (comparatively) very small return for your money; because you are not at the head of the firm; because you have to work harder than any labourer on the premises."

"Anything else?" asked Percy, as the other paused. He had risen during the course of the conversation, and was now standing in front of the fire, looking down upon Lawrence, who answered,

"Because we all want you," and then sat silent.

"That is very kind," said Percy; "very kind, indeed, of you all. Now, suppose, Barbour, we go back a little. There was a time when I did not know what to do with my money; when it seemed as strange for me to have a few thousands and be clear of debt, as what it must to a rogue to be dropped in some strange country where people pre-suppose him honest. I then wanted to turn over a new leaf in my life. I meant fully to stick to the purpose I have since carried out. I intended to renounce the pomps and vanities of a world which had led me a long way on my road to the devil, but I did not know what other road to travel. I carried about my thousands, begging some man to have mercy upon me; to put me into some way of earning my bread and making those thousands many."

"I remember," said Lawrence; "but what of that?"

"I came in those days to Mr. Sondes, hoping with all my heart and soul that he would take me into port. I sailed my craft into his East-End harbour, and he unceremoniously turned me out. He thought I should make ducks and drakes of my money; he fancied the Refinery was a kind of heaven far beyond the deserts of any poor struggling mortal like myself, and negatived by his utter silence a proposition which I never had the heart to propose."

"But he offered to take you into the chemical business."

"Yes, knowing I should refuse it," answered Mr. Forbes; "or in any case thinking the money I should invest there would enable him to put more into the Goodman's Fields concern. Though I had been an idler, Barbour, I still understood enough of business to be up to that move; at all events, he would not have me in the Refinery; you were then the Koh-i-Noor of his imagination, and he did not care for a poor bit of clay like myself."

"If he had taken you into partnership then ——" said Lawrence musingly.

"It would have made a difference in all our lives most probably," finished Percy; "but it is not of what might have been we are talking, it is of what was — of what actually happened. He refused me; I had to take my cattle to another market; and now, solely to please his fancy and to save him trouble, he wants me to withdraw my capital from our firm, and transfer it to his credit."

"Stop a moment," Lawrence exclaimed; "I want you more than he."

"Well, then, your want is of really such recent date that it scarcely deserves even a passing consideration," retorted Percy, resuming his seat. He had said his say, and having done so, felt satisfied.

"I came here to-night meaning to be frank with you, Forbes," answered Lawrence, "only it is so confoundedly hard to be frank! I do not think there is anything in the world so difficult to a man as speaking out his mind."

"Suppose you make the attempt," advised Percy.

"Coming across the bridge, the affair seemed easy enough," the other replied; "but then I had question and answer my own way; you have thrown me out since I entered this room, or perhaps this room ——"

"Suggested memories of the past that make the present less easy to speak about," finished Percy, as his visitor abruptly stopped in the middle of his sentence.

"You are right," was the reply; "this room has made the past seem happier, the present more difficult to endure. I was free when I lived here. I was free to go, and free to come, — free to plan, to hope."

"I hope you are not regretting your marriage," Percy broke in sharply and suddenly; "if you are, do not say anything on the subject to me."

"I do not regret it," answered Lawrence, hotly also; "but I do bitterly lament the position in which my marriage has placed me. Up to the time I proposed for my wife, Mr. Sondes treated me more like a son than like a stranger. He gave me every opportunity of pressing my suit. No man could have been kinder,

more considerate than he. I never had any reason to doubt he would continue to place the same confidence in me till the question of settlements came to be discussed. Then every sixpence of my wife's fortune was settled on herself — tied so tightly that if she wanted to give me a thousand pounds to-morrow she could not do it — tied, in fact, so as to cripple her hand and foot, and make me never a penny the better for having married an heiress: rather the worse, indeed."

"You did not marry her for money, I suppose?" said Percy, putting a strong restraint on himself.

"No; but — what are you doing?" he asked, in a choking voice. "Forbes, have you gone mad?"

"Don't finish your sentence," broke out Percy. "Don't. If you never loved her, remember I did; remember I would have married her if she had not possessed a shilling — if I had been forced to beg bread for her."

"Take your hands away, and do not put them over my mouth again," Lawrence answered. "You suffocate me. My wife is myself. I am not going to say anything disparaging of her. She is everything a man could wish — gentle and good and kind — too gentle and good and kind for me."

"You are right," Percy remarked.

"I am not complaining of my wife," Lawrence went on, unheeding this interruption; "but of her uncle. He wanted me to marry his niece — I am confident he did, and yet the moment I presented myself as a suitor, and had gone too far to recede, he began to distrust me. He would not leave a sixpence in my power. You know yourself he would not even tell me till just lately the nature of his illness. He has been

thinking for months past how to cumber the Refinery, so as to make it comparatively valueless to me. If I only dared to take my own way, and cut the whole concern, let him keep his sugar-pans to himself, and leave his money to the nearest charity; if I only might have a house to myself, and my wife to myself, and be master in a house of my own, I should not mind so much; but as it is — mark you, Forbes, the bread of dependence is not easy to digest, and the wine is often sour."

"Why cannot you cut the whole concern?" demanded Percy Forbes.

"Because I am burdened," was the reply; "because my health is not good; because it is hard to begin all over again; because I have a wife who would break her heart if I were to separate her from her uncle; because I may have children; because, if a man quarrels with his bread-and-butter, he often has to go without breakfast. No, I must stay in Goodman's Fields, and eat humble pie for the present; at all events, unless you will come into the business, and — save me," added Lawrence, despairingly.

"You speak in enigmas," observed Percy coldly.

"Do I?" retorted Lawrence; "it is not a usual habit of mine, at any rate. What I mean is, that at times my present position seems unendurable; that I kick, and pull, and curse, and have to bear the chain all the same; that I am in a cleft stick; that I see dependence on one side of me, and beggary on the other; that it would ruin me to split with Mr. Sondes, while at the same time he is sometimes more than I can endure."

"Yet you think you could endure me?"

"I swear it to you, Forbes, if you will only consent to leave the Isle of Dogs and come to us, you shall never hear an angry word from me. I will be guided by you, so long as I choose to be guided, and when I do not choose to have my way marked out for me, I will find another road, and leave you in peace to travel yours. If Mr. Sondes gets in some large capitalist, I know I shall not stay a week in the Refinery. Ruin, or no ruin, I will never hereafter be at the beck and call of any one as I have been at the beck and call of Mr. Sondes. It is interfering and ordering from Monday morning till Saturday night. There is not a thing I do pleases him; I never knew the meaning of the word slavery till I became a partner. Hang it! a man wants to make money for his own sake, not to be working eternally for the benefit of other people; and when I married Olivine, I did not enter into any compact to sell myself body and soul to Mr. Sondes."

"But without your putting a shilling of capital into the business, he gave you a fourth share of the profits."

"True; but I must have had that sooner or later, married or single."

"For God's sake, Barbour, cease talking about your marriage altogether; it makes me wild to hear you. If you did choose your wife for the money you supposed she would inherit, at any rate, have the decency to hold your tongue concerning that part of the business."

"You are wrong in your suspicion," Lawrence replied. "I did not marry my wife for money, and many and many a time I have wished she had not

possessed a single farthing. It would have been better for me — better by far. But as she has money I must speak of it; must show you to how complete a cipher it reduces me; how it cripples every movement and utterly destroys my happiness and independence, so that you may understand my position clearly."

"I have never thought your position could be a pleasant one," remarked Percy; "but still I do not think you make the best of it, or that you are quite just to Mr. Sondes. He only wants to secure his niece against all chance of poverty, and so to arrange his property now that he can leave it to whom he chooses, without the chance of any unpleasantness after his death. You have no right to expect him to throw up the management of the business to you, with the entire use of his capital. If I married the daughter of any of our people, I should be greatly surprised supposing the reins were thrown to me. When you were first engaged to Mr. Sondes' niece you must have known she would never like to leave her uncle, and you could not have been ignorant also that a joint establishment is not so agreeable as separate houses. You made the arrangement with your eyes open, and if the arrangement has not answered your expectations, you have nobody to thank for it but yourself."

"That fact does not mend matters in the least," said Lawrence.

"True; but it ought to induce you to bear the difficulties your own act has entailed upon you patiently," answered Percy; and there ensued a pause. Then Lawrence turned back to the point whence they started.

"Will you reconsider this," he said, "and come into the business as my partner?"

"No," was the reply. "I cannot."

"But why? — only tell me why. If your capital is locked up, we can make shift somehow. We can pay Mr. Sondes by mortgaging; leave me to manage that! We can take more out of ourselves, and infuse fresh blood and vigour into the concern. I tell you, Forbes, we two, you and I, could work the trade up to anything we liked in a few years' time."

"And I tell you," answered Percy Forbes, "that I am not going to do it. You want to get me into the concern so that you may lord it over me — that you may have everything your own way — that you may stand in Mr. Sondes' shoes, and I in your present ones. You think you would get a pliable, yielding fool of a partner, ready to defer to your superior cleverness, to your greater business experience, willing to let you risk the money of the house in any speculation if you said it promised to turn out profitably. You have come here to-night to try and talk me over, and you think you could talk me over in precisely a similar manner were we sailing in the same boat; but I tell you 'No' again. You may have me for a friend, if you like, but you won't have me for a partner."

"Forbes" — it was Lawrence who spoke now, Lawrence, standing up and looking appealingly, entreatingly, with his strange dark eyes, in Percy's face — "you are all wrong; before Heaven, you are. I do not wonder at your thinking what you have just expressed, but I will try to be frank. Hard, as I said before, as it is to be frank, I will try. I came here to-night, not to talk you over, but to ask you to

save me. It is true, believe me or not, just as you like.

"To save you from what?" asked Percy.

"From myself. I want to turn into shelter. I desire to put a barrier between myself and harm. I do not wish to speculate any more. I wish to cut the West as you have done. I long for rest, and a quiet mind and a quiet conscience, with a longing unutterable. If I were once happy in my business, I think I could settle down contentedly."

"Think," repeated Percy, scornfully, "I have always heard there were people who would not be satisfied in heaven, even if they got there, and I am sure of it now."

"And yet still, though they might not be satisfied in heaven, they would desire to keep themselves out of hell," pleaded Lawrence.

"True," answered the elder man, while his face softened a little. "So," he added, "from the very mouth of the pit you have turned and fled away."

"That is the precise state of the case," Lawrence eagerly replied; "and I come to you as to the little city of refuge where Lot betook himself when he left Sodom."

"It strikes me that Zoar was not a city of refuge at all," remarked Percy Forbes, relapsing into his former manner; "but let that pass: you come here and expect me to help a man who cannot help himself. You want me to relinquish my business in order to keep you straight in yours. In an access of virtue, as strange as it is sudden, you come to a man you have never much liked, and with whom you could not possibly agree, praying him to save you from the evil to

come. The whole affair passes my comprehension. I will not think you are acting a part, but any one might imagine you were."

With a gesture of angry despair Lawrence crossed the room, and taking up his coat, put it on as he answered —

"You may think what you like, and you may do what you like, Forbes; but, upon my soul, I am saying the bare truth when I repeat, I came here this night intending to ask you to save me, and believing firmly that you would do so, my faith in human nature being stronger apparently than yours. There is not a man breathing to whom I would have said what I have, excepting yourself. And now forget all about it, and let us be as though this conversation had never taken place."

"Do you think I have been hard?" Percy demanded, with a dim feeling that even in a nature like Lawrence Barbour's there might be something more than his poor philosophy could grasp. "Do you think I have been hard, — do you think, considering the past, I am unjust?"

"I cannot tell," Lawrence answered; "I will go now and face the future as best I may. If I had been civiller to you in the days gone by, I suppose you would have been more complaisant to me now; but as a man sows he reaps; there never was a truer saying than that."

And Lawrence stretched out his hand to Percy Forbes, who shook it, while somehow in his heart those words, "as a man sows he reaps," were echoing.

At one end of a room stands a closed piano; hand does not touch it, man lays no finger on it; and yet at

the unlikeliest sound some string vibrates and gives forth an answering tone.

To me it has always appeared that many human hearts are like that closed and generally silent instrument which speaks when we least expect its utterance. It is the chance sound, the chance word that awakens an answering echo; it is something which happens to hit the particular note in the soul capable of responding to such an appeal. We may try every tone in the gamut, we may sing the songs we think pathetic, we may tell the stories which seem to us thrilling, we may exert our capabilities, we may use our best powers, and then, when we turn away disappointed, the chance expression touches the one string which returns the same number of vibrations, and unison answers to unison, soul replies to soul. Or the heart is as one of those locks, fastened by a mystical name in the long past, and no man living knoweth the secret thereof. Every name likely and unlikely is thought of, every word containing the proper number of letters is brought to bear on the mystery unsuccessfully, till, behold, a chance phrase suggests an idea, and the puzzle is unlocked, or a ward in the lock of that still more wonderful puzzle made by the hand of God is shot back for a moment at the instance of a key used at random.

"As a man sows he reaps." O Lord, this is not a sowing and reaping for one alone, — but for you, reader, and for me as well as for any other.

"As a man sows." What was Percy Forbes sowing that night, if he made no haste to gather up the tares

and plant corn — sound and wholesome — in their stead!

"As a man sows:" if he sows badly for his fellow, shall he not reap also a portion of the bitter grain? "As a man sows:" Lawrence Barbour had appealed to him for help, and if Percy Forbes refused to give him help in this his strait, how in the judgment day would they two meet?

Vaguely, underlying all human lives, is hidden this problem of future responsibility.

The geological strata of the earth are not more singular than the strata of men's minds. Externally the ground may be green, or the formation may be rocky, but in neither case is the surface reliable. There may be layer upon layer, now dark, now light, now hard, now soft; the exterior may be that of an infidel, a scoffer, a man who has never thought seriously on any subject, whether of life, of morals, or religion; and the world, seeing only the exterior, judges him accordingly; while the man, a reflex of the world's opinion, styles himself, and believes himself to be, a sceptic, or an infidel, as the fashion turns, as the social tide sets. And yet all the time there is something lying deep down in his nature which only requires searching out to prove a pearl of great price.

Men are like the great hills where formation is piled on formation; but yet when the borer comes to search for coal, he often has to pass through iron ere he finds that which he seeks. And what is the end of all religious search but this same question of responsibility? Hereafter, will this come home to me? — as I sow, shall I surely reap? If the seed be the down of thistles, is it certain that in the shadowy future thistles

shall grow up and cover the fields — the pleasant fields of life?

Very vaguely all this passed through Percy Forbes' mind. He had steeled his heart against Lawrence's request to the end that he might protect his own interests from injury. He had determined not to be either tempted or argued or cajoled into embarking in a business which he had always felt a secret hankering after. He had fought not merely against Lawrence's persuasions, but also against his own private desires. He was sick of the monotony of his life at Reach House; but at the same time he had decided he would not change that monotony by acceding to Mr. Sondes' wishes. He felt angry at the persistency with which the question of this partnership was pressed upon him.

"They would not have me long ago," he thought; "why cannot they let me alone now? I will have none of it."

A prudent resolve under the circumstances, perhaps; but still no sufficient reason why he should have been hard with Lawrence, and almost repelled his confidence. They had not talked the matter out as such an important proposal deserved. Suppose he were able to help Lawrence without compromising his own consistency.

"Do not be in such a hurry to go," he said. "Pull off your coat again, and sit down. Perhaps I might know of some one you would like to go into partnership with; at any rate, do not start off in a passion. If I have been impatient, you must make allowance for me. Do you not think yourself it is unreasonable to expect a man to give up his business at your bidding, solely for your personal pleasure and convenience?"

"It would be good for you as well as for me," Lawrence answered, returning and throwing his coat over the back of his chair. He stood with his back towards Percy Forbes as he spoke, and therefore the elder man could not see the smile which curled his lip, nor the look of triumph that lit up his eye.

Had Percy seen the expression of his companion's face, the negociation would have ended on the spot; and yet the whole thing meant nothing more than this, that Lawrence thought he should not fail after all; that Forbes would still in his hands be like wax.

He had no evil design; he had no ulterior object beyond the desire of standing on equal terms with some one. He believed, if Percy would but come into the business with him, that they could work miracles of success. He wanted to turn his back on Hereford Street. He meant, if the chance of safety were given to him, to remain faithful to Olivine, and to keep himself out of the way of harm. He had proposed to go in a fit of downright anger and despair; but now, when he saw deliverance looming in the distance, he could not help smiling at his former fears, — at Percy's utter weakness, as it seemed to him.

It was not in Lawrence Barbour's nature to set his foot down on a thing one moment and lift it out of compassion the next; and yet it was on this very softness and sweetness in Percy Forbes' nature he had calculated for success. In many respects Percy was exactly like a woman — "so his friend decided," — and, like a woman, capable of being wound round at the will of a stronger mind. Vehemently he had declared he would not be talked over, and now Lawrence foresaw he was going to be made yield. For all these reasons

Lawrence smiled; but when he turned and looked at Percy, his face was grave and troubled and worn as ever.

"You do look awfully ill, Barbour," the elder man involuntarily exclaimed. "I wish you would tell me what is the matter with you."

"And I wish, Forbes, you would tell me when there is ever likely not to be something the matter with me," answered Lawrence. "You think it hard for that man over at Reach House to be sick of a mortal disease which will carry him off some day; but, after all, he has had his life, had strength and freedom from pain until within the last few years; while I! since the hour we first met in Hyde Park, — I have never known the meaning of the word health. Is not that harder than Mr. Sondes' case? Was it not cursed luck for me to get such a blow as that on the very threshold of life? Was it not, now? Was it fair for a man who had to earn his bread to be incapacitated from doing so, except with pain and weariness? Do you consider such things just? If you do, I do not."

"It is not easy to understand. I have often thought how well you bore your burden," answered Percy, ignoring the problem Lawrence asked him to solve; "but I hoped till recently you were better. It is only just lately you have been looking so wretchedly ill."

"The work is too much for me," Lawrence replied; "and Mr. Sondes has been for a long time past rather an incumbrance than a help. Then I have had a great deal of anxiety, and harass, and bodily fatigue. I will tell you in what way," he added, drawing his chair a little nearer to the fire, and setting himself with the

air of a person resolved not to stir till he has carried his point.

That was Lawrence Barbour all over. He was going to set himself now to conquer Percy Forbes, as he had set himself years before to conquer fortune.

CHAPTER XII.

Percy is Persuaded.

The two men who sate in Mrs. Pratting's first-floor front, discussing business matters, were very different in outward appearance to the two men who had met so many years before in Hyde Park. The one — a lad then, was a youth no longer. He had "lived and not lingered" by the way; he had gone over much ground in the time; he had worked hard, thought hard, and suffered grievously. Suffered in body and in mind; in body, by reason of the fall he had got almost before his race began; in mind because of disappointments in his affections, in his money-matters, in his pride. He was of a temper to labour diligently and indefatigably; but yet if the labour did not produce fruit so quickly, or of precisely that description he desired to see hanging on the trees in his business garden, he worried over his want of success, over the delay in the gratification of his wishes.

There was nothing buoyant in his nature, very little of thankfulness in his heart. He suffered more keenly from disappointment than he rejoiced in moderate success. Nothing short of the whole could satisfy him; and it is a question whether the whole of his boyish projects would have contented him had it been

possible for such a dream ever to be perfected. As it was, though his rise, to outsiders, seemed miraculous, the result of the race appeared to him so far eminently unsatisfactory. When a horse is expected to win by a head, his owner can scarcely feel that the desired result has been compassed when, reeking and tottering, he comes in sixth.

The bystanders who may never have thought about the steed, or if they did chance to think of him at all, prophesied that he would be nowhere, are astonished at this comparative success, and consider the race has been well run; but nevertheless, there is disappointment in stable and in paddock; another owner has pocketed the winnings, and the sixth steed might as well have been among the ruck, whose deeds were not worth recording. True, the animal may be entered for other races; may win easily other cups; but then, who that has striven for a gold medal, ever cares for "honourable mention;" who that has hoped to be first is ever content to walk in the middle of the procession. There was the evil. The man had been too ambitious; he had expected such a measure of prosperity, that no moderate competency was likely ever to satisfy him. He had wasted his strength; he had fretted his soul, in order to get on too fast; and the result was, that, already, Lawrence looked middle-aged, and haggard, and care-worn, as he sate staring into the fire, thinking of his past, of his present, and of his future.

Work changes most of us, and as he also had worked hard, Percy Forbes' face was a changed one likewise. There were lines where no lines were traced, when first, dear reader, you beheld him; his chestnut hair had grown thinner and darker; he had lost some-

thing of his former elasticity, of that fresh gaiety which had once been so charming; he was more thoughtful, more steady, less foppish, more manly, than at an earlier period of this story. But people were as much attracted by his manner as ever: no one came in contact with him who did not remark on the pleasant frankness of his address, the sweetness of his smile, or the amiability of his temper. The workmen adored him; their wives had always something to say good of the junior partner, as he passed along back streets, and wound his way through dirty alleys and dingy lanes.

He was generous, he was thoughtful, he was pitiful to distress, forbearing towards error; the children were not afraid of him; many a father he had kept out of gaol, many a home he had assisted to hold together, many a wise and tender word spoken just at the right time was remembered both by man, and by woman, though he (the speaker) could not have recollected his ever uttering it. Due East he had found his vocation, but that vocation made him sadder; due East he had found his fate, but that fate took some of the elasticity out of his nature, and changed him in many most important respects from the younger self who had come to take up his residence at Reach House, hopeful as Lawrence Barbour, and almost, in a humbler way, as confident of success.

They had run a good part of the race, and vaguely each was wondering what the end would be, while they remained for a moment or two silent after Lawrence Barbour's last observation.

"You were going to tell me in what way you have been harassed and fatigued," Percy at last suggested,

finding his companion in no haste to continue the conversation.

"Yes," Lawrence answered, "no person who had not followed me step by step during the last few months could imagine how I have been worried and tormented. You have nothing to do with the business arrangements of your firm, I suppose; your department is solely, I believe, to be a general looker-on at the Reach Works, and to pocket your share of the profits?"

It was not a very important post to fill, and Percy felt the confession that he indeed stood exactly in the position Lawrence had assigned him, rather humiliating.

"You are right," he said; "but how can my position affect yours?"

"It does not affect mine," Lawrence replied. "I only named the matter to show you how differently we are situated: you have a certain place in the firm, although a subordinate one; you know your work, you understand what you have to do, and so long as it is done properly, nobody finds fault with you. The whole weight of a business is not thrown on your shoulders; you are not amenable for consequences without having full power to manage as you think best; the other partners do their part instead of standing by and criticising how you perform yours; every day you are not hauled over the coals for something you have done or left undone; if you do not earn much bread, at any rate you can eat what you do earn in peace; you are not afraid to see your seniors entering the office; you have not to bite back your words and swallow humble-pie till you are sick to death of the dish; you are not put on oath as to what you have done, where you have

been, nor how you spend your money; you can discharge a man without consulting the entire firm; you have no tales carried from yard to house; you are, in a word, free. Well, in a word, I am not free — I am a perfect slave."

"In what respect?" asked Percy.

"Have I not this instant told you?" demanded Lawrence. "When I was a clerk I had a great deal more power in the business than is the case now. There is not a move I make, not a sale I effect, not a thing I buy, that has not first to be submitted to Mr. Sondes and approved of by him. He is so exacting and suspicious, that nothing short of a printed and attested statement of all I do, and where I go, from the time I leave Stepney Causeway in the morning till I return to it at night, would satisfy him."

"I am afraid an attested statement would scarcely do so," Percy remarked.

"What do you mean by that speech?" asked Lawrence, sharply.

"I mean that if Mr. Sondes knew about the companies you are connected with, about the time you spend with Mr. Alwyn, about your constant visits to Hereford Street, he would be even less pleased than is the case at present," Percy returned. "I can only say, if I were Mr. Sondes I should not like some of your modes of proceeding in the least."

"How would you have me act, then?" inquired Lawrence. "Would you have me remain a mere cipher in an establishment that would go to the devil in a month if I did not work as I do? I must make money somehow; I must get out of my present position by

hook or by crook; I cannot go into leading-strings now; I will not give up my old acquaintances at the bidding of any one; I cannot endure being called upon to furnish an account of my time as if it were so much petty cash given out to me by Mr. Sondes. I work harder than he ever worked — I am confident of that."

"And is he not satisfied with your exertions?" Percy asked.

"No," Lawrence answered. "Unfortunately the character of the trade is changing, and I cannot make him understand that it is doing so. He thinks I ought to be able to get in cash and turn the money as fast as he used to take a profit out of it. I believe he imagines I keep back the accounts in order to have a fling of my own out of the proceeds before paying them into the bank. You know how willing he used to be to try new experiments, and to pay me for any good idea I suggested. Now the other sugar-houses are shooting past us like express trains. If your people refused to employ the best new tools, should you not consider them idiots? I will be bound there is scarcely a good thing patented that does not find its way to your department."

"We get all the latest improvements, certainly," acquiesced Percy.

"And would make poor way without them," added Lawrence. "Well, imagine the door being shut on every new process; fancy that I dare not try an experiment even at my own expense. He swears I am theoretical of late, rather than practical. He is getting that cursed slang — of things being better managed when he was about — of my only wanting him out of

the way, and all the rest of it; and he declares that, as he cannot now look after his interests himself, he will withdraw from the business altogether, and buy that place he raves about at Grays; and, I suppose, carry my wife down there, and leave me to amuse myself as best I can in Stepney Causeway. Whatever you do, never marry an heiress, Forbes. The slaves in South Carolina are free men in comparison to a husband in such a position."

"Don't, Barbour. Do keep your wife's name out of this discussion. If she could make you rich and happy, she would do it — you know she would."

"Yes she would," Lawrence answered; "you are right there. It is not her fault, poor child." And there came a soft, tender look into the husband's face — a pitying look, it may be, for the love she gave him, for the love he could never, as he then thought, return in kind. Strange problem this, of men and women marrying with wandering hearts — with love, it may be, on the one side, but none on the other; of husbands idolizing wives who have never cared much for their lords and masters; of wives willing to make any sacrifice for husbands who scarcely feel a grain of affection for the women they have wed.

Strange problem this, O Lord, who knowest the secrets of all hearts, the form the skeleton takes in most houses! Why cannot they love? Why do they marry? — why through the ages have men gone on mating with the wrong women, and women persisted in attaching themselves to men who care more for other eyes and other lips than theirs? Does not the whole thing seem sometimes but a series of cross purposes — of cross questions and crooked answers? Jack loves

Gill, but Gill is attached to Will, while Will, in his turn, is dangling after Phyllis, who refuses to vouchsafe him a civil word.

All this passed vaguely through Lawrence's mind as he thought of Olivine and his own matrimonial mistake. He did not love his wife, and he believed he never could love her. In no one respect had his marriage contributed either to his happiness or well-being. He had not got money, or position, or comfort, or even peace. Olivine had her fortune, but it was so tied up as to be perfectly useless to him; and now not even the business was going to be made over to him unconditionally. He would have to pay for it: he must somehow raise money sufficient to purchase such a share as might place him on an equality with his new partner; and if any great capitalist came into the concern, Lawrence thought he must leave the refinery. "I never will be under any man again," he decided, and then he said aloud, "But now, Forbes, to come to business. There is a chance for us both to make our fortunes. I do not think two men ever before had such an opening if we only choose to avail ourselves of it. There is the refinery in full work — there are the customers forming a steady well-paying connection. Mr. Sondes is willing to let us have the lease and goodwill and plant for twenty thousand pounds, and he wishes also to part with the half-share in the Distaff Yard concern for seven thousand pounds, which would place Mr. Perkins on an equal footing with any new partner. I merely mention the Distaff Yard affair incidentally, because I know you would have nothing to do with it. The 'Eagle' Sugar Refinery is, however, quite a different matter. I know what the concern could be made

to pay. If we were once masters there, able to do as we liked, and push the trade along, I for one would not change places with any duke in the land."

"You will not find any difficulty in procuring a partner," Percy remarked at this juncture.

"Yes, I shall," answered Lawrence, "unless you agree to sail in the same boat with me. For one thing, Mr. Sondes would not make the terms so good to other people; for another, there are very few I could work with; for a third, I do not intend ever again to take all the kicks and let a capitalist pocket all the halfpence. I have worked tremendously, and I want in the future to see some result from all my labour, just as you must be beginning to desire a larger profit out of the Reach Works."

"I am quite satisfied with my share," answered Percy.

"Pooh, man!" retorted Lawrence, "you could never persuade me of the genuineness of that statement. There are you, working like a horse from morning till night, with ten thousand pounds in the concern; and with first-rate business capabilities, only drawing a manager's salary out of the firm."

"Who told you that?" demanded Percy.

"Mr. Sondes; but how he knew, I cannot tell you. He said, 'Forbes is only getting about ten per cent. for his money, though he slaves away in those works like a common labourer.' Now, suppose your people were to fail?"

"Excuse me, but I would rather not suppose anything of the kind," interrupted the elder man.

"Very natural; but, suppose at the end of six, or seven, or eight years, there came a smash, and your

ten thousand pounds went down with the ship, should you consider you had meanwhile got any equivalent out of the concern in the shape of position, or ease, or pleasure during that time? You are a complete cipher, you are an utter slave. You have put your thousands into a business which did not need them, and the natural consequence of that is, your thousands are an overplus, and would simply, did any failure occur, go without leaving a trace behind."

"I cannot follow your argument," Percy observed.

"Why, look here, it is as plain as possible; if you put ten thousand pounds into plant and goodwill, and a concern in which you have a voice, if anything happens to the house you are connected with, there is still the plant and lease, and one piece of property or another. In its way, the business is like a freehold, or, rather, in that case, it resembles a house, which a man takes and furnishes from top to bottom. If he lose the furniture under those circumstances, he knows how and why it goes; but suppose he furnishes a room in another person's house, and the brokers come in? Then he loses all his property without ever having incurred a debt himself, just as you would go down with your firm, though you have drawn so little out of it. In a word, you do not share in the prosperity as you would in the adversity. Do you follow me?"

"I think so," was the reply. "Go on."

"It might have been all very well at first," proceeded Lawrence; "but if I were in your shoes, I should not sit down contented with such a position for life. I should expect to see something much more like twenty-five per cent. than ten out of any business I had to do with; and I should want not merely to

pocket that percentage, but also to go on increasing my trade and premises, and plant, year by year. I have no fancy for grubbing on for ever. I should desire, as time went by, to see properties in the country, and houses in town, belonging to me. For a man who is willing to work to rest satisfied with a subordinate post is beyond my comprehension. Of course you can do as you like. I do not wish to urge you beyond a certain point; but I am confident, if you refuse this offer and let such an opportunity slip out of your fingers, you will only regret your decision once, and that will be always."

There was a pause after this, during the continuance whereof, Percy beat a tattoo on the table, and Lawrence watched the expression of his face anxiously.

"I am satisfied the opening is all you say," remarked the elder man, at last; "but I cannot avail myself of it. I would rather, even though the profit be smaller, remain at Reach House."

"You may remain at the Reach Works," said Lawrence, who had been keeping back his last piece of information till such time as he could discharge it with effect; "but I do not think you will remain very long at Reach House."

"And why should I not?" inquired Percy.

"Because one of your seniors has taken a fancy he would like it for one of his sons-in-law. There is a gentleman connected with your firm who does nothing, except draw a tremendous lot of money out of the concern every year, is there not?"

"Yes. I have never seen him but twice, though; he lives somewhere down in the West of England.

You do not mean he wishes to put any of his family in Reach House?"

"That is precisely what I do mean," replied Lawrence. "It appears one of his daughters has made a *mésalliance*, and instead of shipping the young people off to Australia, he contemplates banishing them to the Isle of Dogs. You will hear about it within a month, and then remember my prophecy."

"How the deuce, Barbour, do you contrive to obtain all this information?" demanded Percy Forbes. In answer to which question Lawrence laughed, and said there were more ways of killing a dog than hanging him.

"Fact is," he went on, "your thousands are a mere bagatelle in the capital of the Reach Works Company. They think no more of them than a father does of the hoard in his child's money-box. Come to me, Forbes," he added, persuasively. "We can raise money on the lease and plant to-morrow to pay off Mr. Sondes; we can cut things close for a year or two; we can push the business as it has not been pushed for this many a long day past; we can work together."

"No," interposed Percy, "that is just what we could not do."

"Then it would be your fault if we could not," answered Lawrence; "for I think I could work with the devil, and agree with him too, if I saw my interest in doing so. Come, you shall dictate your terms, and I will abide by them; you shall choose your own department, and I will never meddle with it; or otherwise we will work heart and soul together, having one common end in view — wealth, not a mere beggarly competence —"

"What is competence?" asked Mr. Forbes.

"Always a little more than you have," answered Lawrence, promptly; "wealth, on the contrary, is a great deal more than you want."

"I do not care for wealth," remarked Percy, though in his heart he did care for it very much indeed.

"You will not say that always," replied the younger man: "there comes to most a day when wealth seems very desirable indeed, when the things money can buy look very beautiful hanging in the shop-windows of life; when gold is wanted to secure respect, to employ leisure, to sooth sickness, to make health more enjoyable still. You have not been a Spartan always, neither will you remain one for ever. When you marry and have a tribe of children, you will want money to clothe, educate, and put them out in the world. You will desire luxuries for your wife —"

"I shall never marry," Percy remarked.

"You think so now, but you will think differently hereafter. You will tire of a solitary life as I did; you will meet some one you fancy you would like to have waiting for you in your own home —"

"Don't, Barbour, don't!" the other entreated, and Lawrence held his peace.

"Why do you not take the whole concern on your own shoulders?" asked Percy, after a short silence, reverting to the original subject of conversation. "It seems to me, with your temper, with your capabilities, with your experience, and your push, that course would be far and away the best for you to pursue."

"No," Lawrence replied; "our business requires two people to attend to it — one for the out-door and another for the in; one to look after the money and

another after the goods. If I took it, I must either depend on my own individual exertions or else trust too much to the care and honesty of a manager. I should not like to do that. Even if I were perfectly strong and sound, it would scarcely answer for a large concern like that to hang on one man's health; and as matters stand, it would be perfect madness for me to attempt anything of the kind. No, you must come over to Goodman's Fields, Forbes; there lies the true El Dorado for both of us."

But Percy shook his head.

"I am not going to take 'No' for an answer, remember," declared Lawrence, rising. "You will think the matter over, and try to get rid of your prejudice against me: you shall make your own terms, as I said before, and I will agree to them, provided they be at all within the bounds of reason. I do not want you to do anything in a hurry. Just consider the whole question calmly and dispassionately, and then take your uncle's opinion on it; after that, decide. Meantime, all I have to observe further is, I hope you will agree to let us take ship together. If you do, and that you are not comfortable, it won't be my fault."

"You know I detest speculation," remarked Mr. Forbes; "that I distrust all companies, and promoters, and —"

"Make your mind easy on that score," was the reply. "If once I were in partnership with you, I would stick to my own business and attend to none other. Though I have dabbled in companies, it has only been because I wanted to get money on my own account somehow, to be independent alike of my wife's fortune and of Mr. Sondes. You cannot blame me for

that: you have acknowledged yourself, my position must be a deucedly disagreeable one."

"Are you going to Reach House now?" asked Percy, a little irrelevantly, as it might have seemed to a bystander.

"No," answered Lawrence, who immediately caught the drift of the question; "I shall sleep at Stepney, for I have to be in the City early to-morrow morning, and it's such a deuce of a way from the Isle of Dogs." Nevertheless, spite of this reply, when Lawrence emerged from the *cul de sac* in which Mrs. Pratting's house was situated into the main street, he turned to his right instead of to his left, and pursued his road across the bridges, instead of striking up to the left, towards Stepney.

"I changed my mind," he said to Percy Forbes next morning, "and sent a note into the City, which did nearly as well as going myself. I thought Olivine might feel uncomfortable without me, in case her uncle was taken worse through the night."

"How is Mr. Sondes?" Percy inquired.

"I believe he is a little better. I have scarcely seen him, however; for he was in bed by the time I got back from your place."

And this statement was perfectly correct. Lawrence had scarcely seen Mr. Sondes; but the pair found time, nevertheless, to exchange two sentences.

"Has he consented?" asked the sick man.

"No, but he will," replied Lawrence; and Mr. Sondes fell asleep comforted.

Both knew that when once a man begins to deliberate, he is as far on the road towards yielding as a woman is declared to be under similar circumstances;

they felt confident that if the seed of even partial conviction could once be sown, the plant and the fruit would soon spring to life.

Indeed, there was everything in favour of the change, and very little to be urged on the other side; but the word which perhaps turned the scale was spoken in due time by Olivine.

"What is this I hear Lawrence saying about your going into partnership with him? Have you decided? Is it really true? I should be glad — so thankful! It would be such a pleasure and comfort to my uncle."

"And you, Mrs. Barbour?" he asked.

"Oh! it would be a pleasure to me, of course," she answered. "You have been such a friend to us, you have been so good and kind; I do not know what we should do were you by any accident to drift out of our lives, and be separated from us. Often I have dreaded that; but if you go into partnership with Lawrence it could never happen; could it?"

It could never happen in any case, he thought; but he prudently kept his opinion to himself. Ah, heaven! there is a time when children cease crying for the moon; but the child grown to manhood would scarcely rest content never to see the moonlight, for all that.

To Percy Forbes, Olivine was now as unattainable as the Queen of Night is to the child; but he could not even contemplate the possibility of never again beholding her with composure.

And yet she was always trying his self-command; always making some speech which tempted him almost beyond his endurance; always coming to consult him

about this little trouble, or that impending sorrow; always flinging a ray of sunshine across his path, only, so it seemed to Percy, to leave it in greater darkness the next moment. A hundred times he told himself he was certain one day to speak some word, or make some sign which would frighten her away, and put the consciousness of evil between them; but yet he lacked resolution to leave her, to go where those sweet eyes could never look upon him, where he could never feel the soft touch of her hand, nor hear the low music of her voice. The man was hopelessly in love with her — more in love with her since her marriage than he had ever been before — and yet he lacked courage to tear himself away! Besides which, had he not promised Mr. Sondes to be her friend for ever, to stand between her and harm, should harm in the future approach her?

Faithful and true as he had been to Olivine's mother, Mr. Sondes expected Percy Forbes to be faithful to his niece. He had loved his brother's wife so much that all personal love, all selfish feelings, all despairing passions were wiped out of his heart. He would as soon have thought of making love to a divinity as to the first Olivine when she was once his sister-in-law, and that which he had done he thought it possible for another to do also. He forgot that in his own case the bond of near relationship had interposed one insuperable obstacle both to hope, and to temptation. He never remembered in what different positions Lawrence Barbour and Percy Forbes stood to one another to that occupied by his brother and himself. It did not occur to him that in the one case marriage was as possible as in the other it had been impossible. Thinking of

almost every other conceivable danger which could come to his niece, the peril of such close association to her, and the temptation to which it exposed a man like Percy Forbes, slipped his memory altogether. In business he had every faculty awake; but in a matter like this he was utterly blind.

Even when Percy Forbes told him of the power of fascination Mrs. Gainswoode still exercised over Lawrence — even when he implored Mr. Sondes to keep his niece's husband out of the way of temptation — even when he asked him "where he could have lived all his life not to know Lawrence had never ceased being fond of Etta," — even when, out of the passion and sorrow of his own heart, he pleaded the temptations and spoke of the peril to which another man was exposed — even then, I say, Mr. Sondes failed to see that if there were in the one case danger to Lawrence Barbour, there was in the other, danger to Percy Forbes.

Percy himself was not deceived, however. By the watch he had to keep on his face, by the guard he was compelled to place on his tongue, by the almost irresistible impulse he felt at times to clasp Olivine to his heart and tell her all his misery, all his love — he knew his position was anything rather than one of safety — but yet, though the struggle was fierce, though the battle began anew each day, though he never dared withdraw a sentinel, he elected to fight on.

Better to stay within sight of that fair land, surrounded by enemies, camped among foes, than to retreat into the outer darkness of a country far away from her.

No child was he playing with fire, running his

finger along bright weapons, unaware of their sharpness! He knew the danger, and he faced it; therein lay his security; never once did he shut his eyes to the advance of the troops of evil; never once did he lie down and let his soul take her sleep while the powers of darkness compassed him round about.

"I can keep the knowledge from her," he thought; "and so long as I am able to do that, what does it matter about me?"

"The old story, friends! the old sad story common to all humanity; of one taking upon him in his solitary strength to keep at bay the legions of hell; of one promising to his own soul to perform a task beyond his capacity; the old story of parleying with sin and temptation, instead of fleeing from both; of hungering and thirsting after the beauty, and purity, and sweetness, and grace of a woman whom he ought to have cast out of his thoughts for ever.

Daily by her unconsciousness she stabbed him to the heart; a common misery would, Percy often decided, have been easier to bear than the heavy burden which pressed on his shoulders alone. If he could once have said to her, —

"My darling, I will go, because I cannot run the risk of dragging you down from the height where you stand," — he might have left her, he thought; but as it was, so it was; he would not tell her, and it never entered her mind to conceive the torture she was inflicting!

She never knew, as she laid her hand on his arm to second her request, how much it cost him to refrain from covering it with passionate kisses; she never imagined till long, long afterwards, what made him

stand for a moment still and silent, ere he answered her appeal. All she understood then was, she had carried her point, and that, from thenceforth, as she thought, Percy's interests and those of her husband were to be united.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ada Perkins.

During all the time occupied at Reach House by Mr. Sondes' illness, Lawrence Barbour's anxiety, and Percy Forbes' irresolution, the household in Distaff Yard were in a state of high fever concerning "Ada's young gentleman," such being the mode in which Mrs. Perkins was in the habit of referring to the favoured individual who had aspired successfully to the honour of walking out with her daughter.

Regarding lovers for a moment as fishes, it may be said they are often as difficult to land as they are easy to hook. Supposing the fish itself willing to be dragged to the shore matrimonial, there is generally a stern parent, or cautious guardian holding it back, and striving to keep the innocent from the fate which threatens it.

From the earliest ages the love of two unsophisticated natures has always seemed displeasing in the eyes of some calculating looker-on. Now it is the maiden who might, to the thinking of some people, be improved upon; now it is the swain who scarcely reaches the regulation standard of desired merit.

"Since the time when that foreign King's daughter could not get the man of her 'art, and went mad and

took a fancy, poor dear, to an ass," — thus Mrs. Perkins discoursed concerning the heroine of the "Midsummer Night's Dream." "Since then," proceeded the lady, "the course of true love never have run smooth, and it is not to be expected as our Ada would find her road strewed with roses and lilies, so to speak, and different from the ways of other people. I am sure when Mr. Perkins was a-looking after me the language my mar used about him was dreadful, in a manner speaking, all along of an elderly gentleman who lived private and had house-property at Plaistow, and would have hung me with diamonds, as the saying is, if I'd 'ave had kept company with him. So, Mrs. Jackson, though Ada has got a good education and can play on the pianner, which I never could, and speaks French beautiful, and writes so fine that neither me nor her par can read a word of it, still she musn't set herself to be above the troubles others have had before her, and as I tells her, you've time enough yet to bring the burden of a family on you; and nothing can be more genteel and attentive than young Mr. Reeves, and if you'll just have patience, his papa and yours will settle matters to the mutual satisfaction of all parties, and you'll have a nice nest-egg when you begin house-keeping, and your husband will be on his own account instead of being at the beck and call of a certain gentleman as shall be nameless, which was the case with your poor par, when him and me became acquainted."

"Lord, how you do run on, Mrs. Perkins," observed Mrs. Jackson. "Ain't it two hundred and fifty that they've fell out about?"

"If you like to call it falling out, Mrs. Jackson, when everything is as comfortable and agreeable as

anybody could wish, you may; only all I have got to say is, that the way Mr. Reeves comes and smokes his pipe in our parlour while the young folks are out feeding the chickens and walking about the yard is quite a picture, and better nor many that is sent to the Academy; at least, so Mr. Forbes told me the other day, for I don't know much about the exhibitions myself; says he, — 'Mrs. Perkins, it is a thousand pities Mr. Reeves don't get hisself drawed, for he would make an artist's fortune.'"

"What kind of chickens may yours be that needs feeding in the dark?" asked Mrs. Jackson, harping back to the incautious statement made by her friend, and compelling her to give evidence thereupon.

"They're Spanish, ma'am," retorted Mrs. Perkins, with some indignation — "Spanish; which Mr. Reeves brought over a-setting of in a basket one evening, and one large grey Dorking has hatched nine out of the thirteen — which nine eat as much as a child would do. I suppose it is so long since you were a-courting that you cannot remember the time when you were glad to make an excuse even of a dumb animal to get a word with your young man; but it's different with me; I've got the feelins of a mother, and gives them the chance of an odd minute whenever I can."

"But you needn't wake the hens out of their first sleep to do that, need you?" asked Mrs. Jackson; at which stage of the conversation Ada making her appearance upon the scene, and being put by her mother in possession of the position, observed with a toss of her head, "that if some people who could afford better chose to content themselves with a single sitting-room, and a house where every sentence spoken in the attic

can be heard in the cellar, other people must go where they were able to talk over their arrangements. And, indeed," proceeded Miss Ada, "I told him no later than last Sunday when we were walking past Reach House, in the afternoon — once church in the day being enough for me — that if him and his father did not make up their minds soon it would be too late, because I did not mean wasting my time for ever, waiting for an old stupid to give his consent. There are plenty more in the world just as good as him, and so I said."

"For shame, Ada!" exclaimed Mrs. Perkins, contemplating her first-born with maternal admiration, though she considered it proper to rebuke the maiden for jeopardising her chance of making a good settlement. "For shame, Ada! it is really unreasonable the way you do go on at that young man, as would marry you to-morrow and be glad to do it without a rag to your back, if only his papa would let him. And a nicer genteeler lover I will say you could not desire, nor one as has a sweeter taste in neck-handkerchiefs."

"I do not know about that," answered Ada, taking off her bonnet while she spoke, and giving her curls a shake, looking all the time, as Mrs. Jackson subsequently confided to her husband, "more upsetting than any girl I ever did see."

"His ties are all very well in their way, but we met Mr. Forbes just on this side the bridge, and he had on a scarf something worth talking about. I never saw anything so beautiful, except in an outfitter's window, before, and he had it fastened with a pin that would have made your eyes ache — I could not take mine off it — and I got a good look, too, for I stopped

to ask him about Mr. Sondes and Olivine. He apologised for hurrying by, saying he did not like to interrupt so agreeable a *tête-à-tête*, and 'Arry got quite red and confused, and could not or would not speak a word, so I answered that, 'if he thought me and Mr. Reeves had anything agreeable to talk about, he was very much mistaken.'"

Whereupon Mrs. Jackson declared Ada was the "sauciest girl she knew," and Mrs. Perkins asked her what Mr. Forbes said to that.

"He said, 'Then, Miss Perkins, rumour has as usual exaggerated facts. I had the pleasure of hearing and believing long ago you were about making Mr. Reeves one of the happiest men alive,' and with that," proceeded Ada, "he lifted his hat to 'Arry, who first stood on one foot and then on the other, and nodded like an idiot, till I could have boxed his ears."

"You see what other people think of her," remarked Mrs. Perkins, in an exulting aside to Mrs. Jackson.

"It's such as Mr. Forbes as makes fools of girls," muttered Mrs. Jackson, indignantly, while Ada went on.

"'That's the kind of man I admire,' I says to 'Arry, when we got on the bridge; one that knows what to do, and what word to speak wherever he is, or whoever he meets.' 'If you have a taste for marrying your grandfather, and think you can get him,' 'Arry bursts out, 'don't let me stand in your way.'

"'As for that,' I said, 'my grandfather, as you call him, is only fourteen years older nor me.'

"'Oh!' he says; 'you seem to know all about him, even to the colour, I suppose, of the dress he wore when he was short-coated.' He was just mad with jealousy, so I brought him down a bit, telling him how

Mrs. Gainswoode told me, 'Lor,' she said, 'I have known Percy Forbes since I was so high. There's just three years' difference between us in age. You can ask her, if you like,' I went on, 'when I take you to Hereford Street; she invited me to bring you there the first time she was in town.'"

"Never?" exclaimed Mrs. Jackson, interrogatively. There were bounds to her credulity, and the notion of Mrs. Gainswoode requesting Miss Perkins to call, outstripped those bounds.

"Never!" repeated Ada. "I suppose you don't think," she added, with an impudent laugh, "we are grand enough for Mrs. Gainswoode; but if we ain't, some of our relations are."

"Ada!" said Mrs. Perkins, entreatingly.

"Well, I am sure, ma, you have said the same thing yourself a hundred times. Anybody with half an eye might see that. Do you think Mrs. Gainswoode would have asked herself to my wedding if it had not been for the chance of meeting Lawrence Barbour?"

"Then I hope and trust you won't have her, Mrs. Perkins!" exclaimed Mrs. Jackson; "and that dear young wife of his a-going to bring an innocent child into the world and all. Don't for any sake, Mrs. Perkins, have her in your house; a baggage I always said she was, and a baggage she'll be to the end."

"Ain't Lawrence old enough and ugly enough to take care of himself?" cried out Miss Ada; "and Olivine is no such simpleton as you imagine, either. 'Let me know when your marriage is to take place,' she said, the very last time I saw her, 'for I intend to come to it;' and she drew her lips quite tight, and she clasped

her hands together till I could see she left the mark of her nails in them."

"God help her!" ejaculated Mrs. Jackson.

"Well, she was always a stuck-up piece," answered Mrs. Perkins, "and I am certain that beautiful chapter the curate read us out the other Sunday, about pride going before a fall, was quite true. I thought at the time of Olivine, and the way she used to hold herself above my children, and that, perhaps, her husband not caring for her might be a judgment for it after all."

"Don't talk that way, Mrs. Perkins, — you've girls of your own," remonstrated her friend.

"Yes, but I'm thankful to say my girls is very different from what Olivine ever was, and they've been differently brought up, I'll be bound. Now, she could not darn a stocking was it ever so."

"And I'll be bound I'll never darn a stocking when I'm married, let it be ever so," added Miss Ada; which remark drew a severe rebuke down upon her from head-quarters, and an observation to the effect that perhaps the day might come when she would be glad to have any stockings to mend.

"I'll go after that, I think," remarked Ada; "I'm not likely to hear better to-day," and she rose to leave the room, knocking down a chair in her progress, and pursued by Mrs. Jackson with —

"Mind my advice, and don't torménd Mr. Reeves too much, or you may lose him altogether."

"Let him go," retorted Ada; "there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it."

"Yes, but perhaps not for you to catch," returned Mrs. Jackson, who was wont in the bosom of her

family to speak of that Ada Perkins as "perfectly odious."

"And whatever that there young Reeves, as really is a quiet, respectable man, can see in her to make him take on as he does, is a perfect puzzle," added the soap-boiler's wife. "He is just inveterate about her," the meaning of which last sentence it is not for me even to attempt to explain.

"Perhaps it is her money, my dear," suggested Mr. Jackson. "A thousand pounds is a very snug thing for a wife to bring her husband. It is not every one as has that much."

"You needn't be giving any of your side-wipes at me, Mr. J.," exclaimed his better-half. "If I did not bring you much money, I brought you what was more to the purpose — a quiet, managing wife, not taken up with fal-lals, nor wearing her hair in curls all round, that it would take half a day to comb out. It would not surprise me any minute to hear the match was broken off. I know if I was Mr. Reeves I would not stand her goings-on, that I would not."

But for all the tide of Mrs. Jackson's good opinion set so strongly against Ada Perkins, Mr. Henry Reeves remained constant to the lady of his choice — constant as the needle to the pole.

Nature understands such matters better than we do, it may be concluded; for certainly in some ranks husbands offer themselves for the acceptance of young ladies of the Ada Perkins stamp, in a manner which to ordinary understandings is incomprehensible.

The hats, the hair, the sweeping feather, the immense crinolines, the short petticoats, the gilt earrings, the pert manner, the forward address, the flippant

manner, the assured walk, the mixture of red and blue that such girls always affect in their dress, form to the minds of some men an ideal of perfect grace and beauty.

The very showiness of the creature fulfils their notion of absolute perfection. They like the *tout ensemble* of short jackets, looped-up skirts, striped petticoats, enormous hoops, light hair, scarlet, or blue, or mauve, or green feather, small hat, clear complexion, and pink cheeks, which attract the attention of other men of their own standing in society; and they go in to possess it, just as they might be tempted to enter a shop and purchase something which caught their fancy through the glass.

Have you never, walking through London, wondered to yourself who buys the bonnets, the dresses, the shawls, the flowers, the ribbons, the valentines, the jewellery, the huge necklaces, the tremendous Albert chains, the astonishing studs, the heavy rings and trashy brooches, set with worthless stones and coloured glass, that are exhibited at every step?

And yet these things are simply got up to supply a demand. They suit a certain popular taste much better than simplicity or pure art, or the most exquisite production of the craftsman and designer could do by any possibility.

A great coloured print, with lots of blue sea and green cliffs, and a few children in scarlet petticoats scattered about, elicits admiration, where the finest engraving, the most perfect painting, might be exhibited in vain; and, in like manner, a girl of Ada Perkins' appearance was sure to attract admiration in

her own rank as soon as she appeared a candidate for such attentions.

Plenty of young men came dangling after her. She was much gazed at in church, and many stricken swains were in the habit of loitering round the door of St. Anne's, on the chance of exchanging a word with her when she came forth from that church.

Mr. Reeves knew perfectly well there were others waiting to snatch his prize from him — others who envied him the privilege of walking out with Ada, daughter of Josiah Perkins; and the delay wherewith that young lady twitted him originated entirely at head-quarters, and not in the slightest disinclination on the part of the bridegroom elect to run his head into the matrimonial noose.

To him Ada was the realisation of his ideal of a fine-looking girl. He considered her appearance "distinguished," her manners "superior." Offer a child a fourpenny-piece or a penny, and it takes the largest and, to its comprehension, the most precious coin. Nature sends women of all sorts into the world to be admired and wooed and won, and thought perfection by men of all sorts. What would you? A smart housemaid could not fail in distracting attention from Venus, were Venus to go out and try her chance among the eligible young men who walk abroad on Sunday afternoons and evenings. Speaking of a very different subject, an American writer puts this same matter before one very neatly. "Is there not many a man," she asks, "whose pulses thrill to the notes of 'Yankee Doodle,' who would yet sit calm and impassive under 'Casta Diva?'"

While the young people made love, the parents

discoursed about money. While the maiden and her affianced talked concerning their future home, where they were to be all in all to one another, and where the furniture was to be "spick and span new," to quote Ada's expression, and covered in green, with yellow gimp and tassels to match, Mr. Perkins and Mr. Reeves were settling how that home was to be maintained and the furniture paid for.

The bride's fortune has been a point of disagreement for many a century, among persons whose brides were possessed of any dowry whatsoever, and it was concerning the few hundreds which happened to be the cause of dispute between Messrs. Reeves and Perkins that Ada's mother made the remark anent the course of true love, duly chronicled in the commencement of this chapter.

During the period while this negociation was pending, Mrs. Perkins' state of mind entitled her to the extremest compassion. Most earnestly she desired to see Ada "in a home of her own." She looked forward with pleasant anticipations to the time when she and the juvenile members of the Perkins house would all go over in the summer evenings to drink tea with Ada at Old Ford. She babbled about green fields, utterly innocent that Falstaff had done the same thing before her; she stimulated the imaginations of the younger children by placing before them visions of buttercups and daisy-chains that were to be gathered and manufactured in the fields lying round and about "sister Ada's beautiful house where she is to live when she is Mrs. 'Enery Reeves." She would have sacrificed much to make these dreams realities, but at the same time those odd hundreds seemed to be a very terrible

price to pay for a few cups of tea, and the delight of sitting in an arbour. They had other children, she and Josiah, other daughters to be portioned, some to be educated and placed out at business. Why could not old Mr. Reeves, who had not another "chick or child, beside 'Arry, except a girl, who was quite a sight by reason of her nurse having let her fall when she was an infant, and broken her back" — why could not the head of this absurdly small family content himself with Ada's thousand pounds, and not come haggling after more? That was what Mrs. Perkins wanted to know — she hated such mean ways. "She had not a sixpence when Josiah married her, and you see," she remarked to Lawrence Barbour, "how we have done; but things is changed since that," she went on, "as Mr. Jackson says, our children want to begin where we left off."

"And perfectly right they are, too, if they can only manage it," answered Lawrence, replying to the spirit of the lady's sentence, rather than to its strictly grammatical sense.

"Ay, but it is not everybody as is as fortunate as you," retorted Mrs. Perkins; whereupon, Lawrence told her he had an appointment in the City at one o'clock — (this conversation took place in the Commercial Road) — and must wish her "good morning."

Another matter which disturbed the tranquillity of Mrs. Perkins' managing temper, was that she did not know what to do about Ada's trousseau. The fashion of under-garments changeth very little, "so that" — there really is no use attempting to convey Mrs. Perkins' meaning save in Mrs. Perkins' own words — "her body-linen can be made up ready, because then it will

do, no matter when or who she marries;" but dresses were a different matter altogether.

She thought one day crinolines would go out, and the next that tight sleeves would come in; that waists might go up again to under the arms, and gored skirts become "all the go."

She took the advice of friends; she studied the opinion of fashion-books lent her by the dress-maker who worked for her by the day; she got distracted over the French phrases, and was always calling Ada to know what this meant, and that; she even went down to Reach House to ask Olivine's advice on the subject, and returned thence, declaring she thought marriage and the impending cares of a family had made quite another thing of the girl, and that she did not know when she had held such a comforting conversation with anyone.

"And, Ada, I insist you never say a word to anybody again about her husband liking Mrs. Gainswoode better nor her. If she was a stuck-up piece once, it is no reason why her poor 'art should be broken now."

"Yes, ma," answered Ada, going out of the room, with her face looking as though it had been suddenly plunged into turkey red.

For the moment even Ada felt repentant; she knew what her mother did not know, viz., that through her means the scandal had already found its way to Olivine; that the poor wife comprehended at last not merely how fond Mrs. Gainswoode was of Lawrence, which seemed a light matter, but how fond the little world of Limehouse did not scruple to say her husband still was of that "bold, bad woman," — so Olivine inwardly styled her — "with the snake's hair."

"I shall certainly be present at Ada's wedding, Mrs. Perkins," the young wife observed. "My uncle, as he cannot go himself, would, I know, wish me to do so, and we wish our gift to her to be something she really can use; so I want you to tell what the other presents are, and then we shall better be able to judge of our own."

"I'll tell you what nobody has thought of," said Mrs. Perkins at once; "a china tea-service."

"Has any one given her a silver tea-service?" demanded Olivine, smiling in spite of herself.

"Silver! Lor, Olivine! — Mrs. Barbour I mean — who do you think would give my Ada silver?"

"I cannot tell in the least," answered Olivine; "if you think no one else is likely to do so, we will."

After that Mrs. Perkins decided no ill ought to be spoken of Lawrence Barbour or his wife. Not even when in due time Mrs. Gainswoode's offering arrived in the shape of a really very beautiful brooch was she exalted over Olivine.

"I could get it myself for five or six pounds," sneered Mrs. Perkins, laying the trinket back in its case; "but those beauties," apostrophising thus the silver tea-service; "it is unknown the money they cost."

Indeed, at that particular moment Mrs. Perkins felt that she and hers were bound to be loud in their expressions of gratitude towards the whole of the Sondes' connection. After long years "Josiah" had at last reaped his reward; Mr. Sondes, in acknowledgment of the length of time they had spent in business together, increased his interest in the concern without any pecuniary consideration a fourth more, making him thus half owner of the works.

"It is true enough, those grumpy people are the best to have to do with in the end; they are the justest," decided Mrs. Perkins, while her husband was fighting his last battle with Mr. Reeves concerning his daughter's fortune.

"Come now," exclaimed the old gentleman, taking his long pipe out of his mouth, "let's make the young people 'appy, and decide on something this evening. If you'll make it ten, I'll double it, and if that's not acting 'andsome, I'd like to know what is."

Mentally, Mr. Perkins congratulated himself on having kept his own counsel, and said nothing concerning the improvement in his circumstances.

For the sake of appearances he sat and considered Mr. Reeves' proposition for a few minutes; then he said, "Very well, I'll make it the ten."

"You will!" exclaimed Mr. Reeves.

"I will," repeated Mr. Perkins.

"Shake hands on it, then," said Harry's father.

With which request Mr. Perkins gravely complied.

"Now let's drink wealth, 'ealth and 'appiness to the two A's," suggested Mr. Reeves, to which appeal Mr. Perkins, not without a pleasant sense of having "done" the "old screw," responded willingly.

After that Mrs. Perkins was called in, the young people were duly informed that a satisfactory arrangement had been arrived at, Miss Ada was requested to name the day, and Miss Ada's mother at once sent off Jane the fiftieth time for the dress-maker, and "tell her to bring the fashions," screamed Mrs. Perkins down the yard after her messenger.

Then was performed a deed of generosity which enshrined Mr. Sondes for ever in the inmost recesses of

Mrs. Perkins' heart. He sent that lady a cheque for fifty pounds, and requested her to expend it on her daughter's wardrobe.

"I won't have Miss Spriggs in to make one of them," was Mrs. Perkins' somewhat ungrateful conclusion. "We'll go to Mrs. Barbour's own milliner, and see what she can do for you."

But on this resolution Mrs. Perkins cooled before morning, and Miss Spriggs had the work, and the house was in a litter from that day forth until Ada left it.

Curiously enough this wedding was a fact upon which Olivine and her husband had never touched to one another, save in the slightest manner possible. By the time it was finally settled upon, Mr. Sondes had so far recovered as to be moved back to Stepney Causeway, and it was consequently in her old home that Olivine had just completed arraying herself for the occasion, when Lawrence abruptly entered her room.

"You are not going to that row?" he said.

"To Ada's wedding? — certainly I am," she answered.

"I won't have you go, Olivine," he exclaimed. "The persons you will meet there are not fit persons for my wife to associate with. It is all very well to call on Mrs. Perkins occasionally, and to send the girl presents, but they are not a family I wish you to cultivate; it is not a house at which I wish you to visit much."

"It was there I first met you, at all events," answered Olivine. She stood facing the looking-glass, and resolutely keeping her back to him as she said this, nervously settling her bonnet-strings the while; but Lawrence could see her face reflected in the glass,

and noticed she was white as a corpse, that her very lips were utterly colourless.

"That is no reason why you should go to such a gathering as will be at St. Anne's to-day. If you had mentioned your intention to me before, I should have told you that on Ada Perkins' marriage I wished all intercourse with her to cease; I do not want to be mixed up myself, nor to have you mixed up with the whole trading population of the east of London. Olivine, you really must send a note to excuse your absence, I am not going myself, and —"

"It is much better you should not go, as Mrs. Gainswoode is to be there," broke in Olivine at this point. "Were my being present likely to cause scandal, I should not go either; as it is —"

She was stopped by the slam with which her husband's dressing-room door closed.

He had never answered her by a word, but she heard him now pulling out the slides in his wardrobe, and cursing audibly at locks that would not unfasten; at doors which in his hot haste he was unable to open.

Never a more hurried toilette was performed by man; almost before Olivine had arranged her bows to her satisfaction, and while she still stood before her table drawing on her gloves slowly, and with her thoughts far away from dress and the vanities thereof, Lawrence rejoined her.

"I have changed my mind," he said coldly, "we can go together;" and together accordingly they passed down the stairs, and crossed the hall and entered the carriage which was waiting for them.

CHAPTER XIV.

At the Wedding.

In utter silence, husband and wife drove along the Commercial Road and down Three Colt Street to St. Anne's Church: Olivine, leaning back in one corner of the carriage, kept her eyes resolutely fixed on the coachman, while Lawrence as persistently looked out of the window beside which he sat, at the passing conveyances, at the carts on the tramway, at the teams of heavy horses that drew great sugar hogsheads from the docks to the various refineries round about the City end of Whitechapel, and the neighbourhood of Goodman's Fields.

Both their hearts were as full of bitterness as they could hold; and when the heart is full the lips remain closed. The wife had done an intensely foolish thing After keeping silence about her grievance, — after refraining from complaint or remonstrance, — after nursing her fancied wrong in the solitudes of her soul, — after remaining mute so long that Lawrence could not possibly dream of the violence of the storm which was brewing, — she allowed all the jealous anger she had been nursing to break out in one sharp sentence, spoken suddenly and bitterly. Whether a woman says much or little on such occasions, she is always certain to say the wrong thing; inevitably she irritates a man either by violence or by some stinging expression. The very knowledge of her weakness makes a woman careless where she strikes. She is feeble, and for that

reason, instinctively, she selects the point most open to attack.

The majority of men, even in their angriest moods, never express quite all they feel; whilst, as a rule, women say more. Let the utterance of resentment have been long deferred as it will — let the fire blaze up in a moment or break out after smouldering for months — the result in one sense proves the same — hastily the woman speaks, for no conceivable object, apparently, save that in the after-time she may repent at her leisure.

That a certain cause will produce a certain effect is one of those facts which the weaker sex never appear able to grasp. That bitter words can ever bring about disastrous results they will not understand. Without calculating consequences in the least, they throw their tiny bits of lighted paper into shavings and gunpowder, and then they marvel at the abomination of desolation which eventually ensues.

Leaning back in her corner, Olivine was already trembling over what she had done, and wishing her sentence unspoken; but she was still irritated and excited, and even had she not been, Lawrence certainly looked in no temper to receive any professions of penitence graciously.

Truth is, had his wife exhausted her ingenuity to find the best means of annoying him, she could not have selected a form of words more likely to achieve that end than the one she had chosen.

To tell him in a half-completed sentence that she set his wishes and his authority at defiance; that she was jealous; that she had learned, not vaguely or uncertainly, but positively, the secret of his unconquered

affection for another woman; that there was scandal afloat; that his miserable infatuation was the talk of gossips; that she intended to go wherever he and Mrs. Gainswoode were likely to meet; that she considered herself wronged; that she had listened to stories concerning him; that she had taken her stand in the matter, and meant to maintain it; that she had been brooding over the matter in silence! — surely the man might be excused for thinking there was method in her madness; that a few words implying so much never could have been uttered at random.

Looking out at the passing carts, at the broad road, at the cabs, and the pedestrians, Lawrence was inwardly swearing at his fate, digging down into every deep well of his heart, and drawing out thence springs of bitterness, waters of Marah. He had married a wife, and this was the result; better to have waited, as he once said he would, till he was forty, and then wedded an old woman for her money, than to have bound himself to endure this.

"If God had only put it in my way to marry a woman and not a child," he thought, "some one who could understand what I have suffered and what I have resisted!" and then all the restrained passion of the man's nature rose up in arms against what he considered his wife's coldness, and want of comprehension.

It was as though, in the agony of physical suffering, there had been wrung a cry from the depths of some suffering creature's heart — a cry of despairing anguish, of unreasoning indignation against those who could not feel his pain as he felt it, who could not appreciate the torment of his malady, the torture which the lightest touch occasioned.

He had fought with his infatuation; he had avoided meeting the only woman he could ever love passionately; he had sworn to himself he would be true to Olivine; he had kept his foot from any place where he was likely to meet Etta; he refrained from answering her many letters, save in the shortest manner consistent with ordinary politeness. Having done Olivine the wrong of marrying her at all; having resolutely shut his eyes to the fact, that, to compass the happiness of a nature like hers, it was necessary for her to be loved wholly, rather than in the first instance to love much herself; having failed in these two points, he yet had set himself determinedly to make her what reparation lay in his power; and this was the result.

This! — a jealousy which might go on through the years increasing till life became a burden to both of them; a want of appreciativeness that, as he imagined, would prevent Olivine thoroughly comprehending him while the sun shone by day, or the moon by night.

She was very sweet; she was very pure; she was very innocent; she was what a man might desire the mother of his children to be in every thought, and word, and deed; but she never could be to him what many a worse woman can prove to one she loves in the hour of his blackest despair, of his deepest need.

"O Lord, if she were only able to understand!" he mentally finished, without ever an idea entering his mind that, in the future, she would understand him fully, and he, her, too late.

Who, walking erect through smooth places, along secure paths, can sympathise entirely with the poor wretch that has fallen among stones and rocks, and stumbled along dangerous roads, getting soiled and

stained and sullied as he went? who that has never seen a battle can compare notes with him who has been through the mad charge, and the awful repulse, and the blinding smoke, and the fierce hand-to-hand encounter? and, in precisely like manner, what woman who is half a saint, who has been kept pure as the angels, who has never even brushed skirts with sin, can, at first in her indignation, remember mercy, and know how rough the ways of virtue prove occasionally to those who, with heart and soul and strength, are striving to forsake the thing which is evil, and cleave to that which is right?

Olivine could not, at all events; and yet she felt in a vague, terrified sort of way, that she had made some terrible mistake; that she had put division between herself and her husband; that she had blindly struck at the foundation of her own happiness, and brought the edifice down about her ears. If she had dared, she would have asked her husband to allow her to return home; and, as it was, miserable at the idea of passing some time unreconciled to him, she could not refrain, as they drew close to the church, from laying her hand on his and saying, pleadingly, "Lawrence!"

He did not take his hand away, neither did he clasp hers in return. "Well," he answered, slightly turning his head from the window while he spoke.

"Are you angry?" she inquired. The carriage had stopped by this time.

"No," he replied, handing her out; "I am not angry; you have misjudged me, that is all."

"Oh! Lawrence," she began, but he stopped her.

"For Heaven's sake, Olivine, do not make a scene.

To please yourself you have chosen to come here; to please me, command your feelings now you are here."

She knew what he meant in a moment; more quickly than anyone might have imagined her capable of taking such a hint, she comprehended his desire, not merely that she should be silent, but also that she should be civil to Mrs. Gainswoode; and as she crossed the step and entered the church, there arose in her mind the determination to silence scandal, and to do what she could, to clear her husband's name from the cobwebs of gossip busy men and idle women had woven across it.

Heaven knows what put such a thought into her heart; but it came to her suddenly that, let him have wronged her as far as he would, there was no necessity for all the world to know the fact, and that if she were to appear on friendly terms with Mrs. Gainswoode, it would do more to contradict the libel than any form of words she could use.

By right of knowledge an older woman would have understood all this, and been able to reason the matter out; but it was simply an affair of instinct with Olivine.

Without any previous reflection she jumped to the conclusion that she would not afford Mrs. Jackson and Mrs. Perkins food for further gossip.

"Whatever I may think about her, I will not show it," she decided; and though her hand trembled a little when she silently greeted Mrs. Gainswoode in the aisle, though she felt she was pale and white as they stood side by side a little behind the bridal party, though she could see Mrs. Perkins whispering to Mrs. Jackson, who immediately directed her eyes first to Etta and then towards Lawrence, still she held her ground re-

solutely, and kept close to her enemy through the service.

Anything like Ada as a bride, Mrs. Gainswoode subsequently declared, was "never beheld, excepting in Limehouse Church that day;" anything so confident as her replies, so bouncing as her manner, so triumphant and offensive as her general demeanour, the imagination of man could scarcely conceive.

She would not have been Mrs. Perkins' daughter, of course, had she not torn her glove in getting that article off her left-hand; neither, most assuredly, would she have been Ada Perkins, had she not made an effort to assist the bridegroom in slipping the ring on her not reluctant finger. Whereas Mr. Henry Reeves suffered much tribulation of mind and made many mistakes during the ceremony, Ada had all her wits about her, and surveyed with considerable complacency the spectators who thronged the church.

"Ain't there a lot, 'Arry?" she whispered to her husband as they passed down the aisle together, "linked," observed Mrs. Perkins, which was her way of stating that the pair walked arm-in-arm. "Ain't there a lot come to see us?" Whereupon Mr. Henry Reeves, red as a peony and looking sheepish and abashed to an extent, muttered something unbefitting a church, that caused the bride to titter audibly.

The clergyman, unused to such merriment on melancholy occasions, looked at the "young woman" with rebuking gravity, when she again giggled at having to sign her name; to which look Ada replied by tossing her head, glancing round the company, and remarking to Percy Forbes, "she thought some one might have had the civility to offer her a chair."

"Considering the importance of the document to be signed, I think so too," he replied, hastening to comply with her request; fortified by which piece of gallantry, Ada stared defiantly at the curate, who, she imagined, had greatly neglected his duty in not finishing up the service by kissing the bride.

"He had black hair, with a natural curl in it," she wrote subsequently to a school friend, "and such beautiful brown eyes and white hands;" for all of which reasons, perhaps, Ada considered his omission unpardonable, and thought he had scarcely gone through the "Solemnization of Matrimony" according to the Rubric.

But if the bride's behaviour were wonderful in church, it was more remarkable still at the wedding-breakfast. In honour of being married she had at length done away with her curls, and wore her hair "rolled," enormous frizettes appearing in various places through it.

The moment she entered the house she tossed off her bonnet and commenced settling her light locks to her satisfaction. She had a pert word for everybody. In her mother's opinion she kept "the room going." She laughed at her husband's mistakes; she prompted him when he returned thanks; she managed to get Mr. Forbes beside her, and quizzed him about one of the bridesmaids unmercifully. When Mr. Henry Reeves finally suggested they should miss the train if "she did not look sharp," she first observed "he need not talk about being sharp, he was none so much so himself;" and then remarked to all whom it might concern, "She was sorry she could not stay with them always," a re-

gret which Mrs. Gainswoode assured her was felt by the company generally.

But for all that the company endured her absence with astonishing equanimity. Mrs. Perkins at first, indeed, considered it necessary to retire to the sofa with one of her younger children and a pocket-handkerchief; but soon recollecting that no crying would bring her first-born back again, and that moreover, the match being a very good one, it would be extremely undesirable to bring her back even if she could, she returned to table, and was induced to "sip a drop of wine" in honour of Mr. Hills' toast, which wished "to the young people as was just started in life a fair wind and a prosperous voyage."

"Have they gone abroad?" asked Mrs. Gainswoode, after the glasses had been duly emptied. "I had no idea they intended leaving England."

"It was to the voyage of life, ma'am, I was alluding," exclaimed Mr. Hills, who sat beside Etta; "which often proves stormy, ma'am, even when newly married folks has a good cargo at starting."

"Oh, I understand," said Etta; "you mean there are so many things required on board the ship matrimonial — ballast among the number."

At which remark Mr. Hills, who in his heart had no great affection either for Ada or Mr. Henry Reeves, laughed till his merriment attracted the attention of the company.

"It is only a joke between this lady and me," he declared, in answer to various entreaties not to keep all the fun to himself, — "only between you and me, ma'am, ain't it?"

"Strictly private and confidential," replied Etta;

whereupon Mrs. Hills looked daggers at the fashionable intruder, "with her airs and graces," and at once commenced mentally composing a lecture with which, in due course of time, Mr. Hills' morals were benefited exceedingly.

"I am sure I wonder that quiet Mrs. Barbour can abear her," marvelled Mrs. Hills to Dr. Reddy; "and to see the way they were talking together you might have taken them to be sisters; but justice is justice all the world over, and I must say, doctor, as I don't think Mr. Barbour cares a brass farden about his old flame, now. He never once laid his eyes on her, unless she spoke to him — never once."

"I always said, Mrs. Hills, if you remember, that it was nothing but idle gossip," answered the doctor, who had his own private opinion notwithstanding, and did not think Lawrence's reserve incompatible with a considerable amount of affection.

"It was Mrs. Perkins first started it," remarked Mrs. Hills.

"You know there were people ill-natured enough to say Mrs. Perkins herself would once have liked him for a son-in-law," added the doctor, blandly; "it just shows what people will imagine. There is really no believing anything excepting what one sees."

All this time Lawrence was on thorns to get out of the house and back to business; and after Mr. Reeves being asked for a sentiment had proposed somewhat thickly, "May this be the unhappiest moment of our lives," Olivine whispered to Mrs. Gainswoode that they were going, and inquired whether she would accompany them to Stepney Causeway.

"If you will allow me," answered Etta, blithely, and she squeezed her way out of the small room, remarking to Mrs. Perkins while she tenderly pressed her hand, "we shall meet again this evening, I hope."

"You are going to Mrs. Rolte's, of course," she said to Olivine as they drove along the Commercial Road. Mrs. Rolte was Ada's godmother, who had decided on giving a party in honour of Mrs. Henry Reeves' settlement in life.

"No," Olivine answered, "I have had quite enough of Limehouse society for one day."

"Men and women are never prophets in their own country," remarked Mrs. Gainswoode. "It requires a person from the north or west to enjoy such a party as that this morning. Percy was delighted with it, I am sure."

"It grieves me to join issue with your highness," answered Percy, who sat opposite to her; "but I believe I have had rather too much of the East-End prophets to care much for their conversation. The intellectual food in this part of the town is too strong to agree for long with infants."

"What a singular being you are!" exclaimed Mrs. Gainswoode. "And you?" she added, turning to Lawrence.

"I! Oh! I cannot go," he replied. "I went this morning because my wife wished to do so; but I really have neither time nor inclination to attend all the social gatherings that may be convened in honour of Ada Perkins' wedding."

"Well, I call it detestable of you," exclaimed Mrs. Gainswoode. "I must either go alone, or not go at all,

and I had set my heart on seeing the East-Enders *au naturel* for once."

"Do you mean in their attire?" asked Percy Forbes.

"No, I do not mean in their attire altogether," she replied; "though that I dare say will be primitive enough; but I want to see them at home — at home, as people never are except in the evenings, under the gaslight. My dear child," she proceeded, addressing Olivine, "if you lived as much among stuck-up conventional people out of whom there is not an atom of fun to be got from year's end to year's end as I do, you, too, would, perhaps, be glad of a little variety."

"I will go with you if you like," said Olivine, to Lawrence's intense astonishment.

"You had better not," he suggested; but Etta broke in with, —

"Now, Mr. Barbour, do let your wife have an opinion of her own for once. I think it charming of her to give up her personal pleasure to gratify my whim. And so we will go alone and independent. What say you, Percy?" and Mrs. Gainswoode glanced at him sharply as she spoke.

"I say that I think we ought to follow the example of such gallant leaders," he observed. "Will you be one of the party, Barbour?"

"No," Lawrence answered. "I will do your work if you like to be present, though for what earthly reason any of you can desire to see more of such people is a mystery to me."

"Which only shows that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy," remarked Mrs. Gainswoode, opening the

brougham door and springing out before any one could assist her in alighting. "And so that is settled," she went on, speaking to Olivine, as they ascended the staircase, "and we go together, and remember tea is to be at seven o'clock, and I intend to eat shrimps and bread and butter in quantity, if those are the edibles provided. And I mean to dance till I cannot see, and sing till my voice cracks, if I am asked to do so."

Thus the lady rattled on, and the talk was pleasant, and lively enough, during the afternoon, and no one would have thought there had been any storm in the morning, so calm was the light resting on the faces of the speakers sitting round the fire, which seemed cosy and cheerful, for the season was still early spring and cold, though violets and primroses were being hawked about the streets.

Then, at last, Olivine rose, saying she would change her dress; and shortly after she went upstairs, Lawrence followed her. For hours they had never been able to exchange a word, and now, when at last they were alone again, Olivine, ready as such natures always are to blame herself and make the first advance towards reconciliation, said to him, with her arm flung round his neck, and her cheek pressed close to his,

"Are you angry with me still? I am sorry for the folly I talked this morning, and I have done my best all day; I have indeed."

"My darling, you are too good for me," he answered.

"No! oh, no!" she whispered, and he felt her tears on his cheek.

"But I say yes," he persisted, and in his words there was a second meaning. She was too good for him; too good to comprehend, to sympathise; too gentle to keep him, of her own strength, from the evil to come.

"Who told you anything about me, Olivine?" he went on; "was it Percy Forbes?"

"Percy Forbes!" she repeated in amazement. "No, certainly — Ada Perkins."

Whereupon Lawrence, not without a certain sense of relief, anathematised Ada Perkins and the whole Perkins connection, the head of the house only excepted, and kissed his wife again so heartily, that the poor little soul, still clinging to him, murmured, "I do believe you love me best, after all." To which he answered, "Best! ay, five hundred times best, my child!" and she had never the sense to remember he had not added, "and most, too."

After that he left her to finish her dressing, and went down to the drawing-room again, where Mrs. Gainswoode stood alone, Percy Forbes having been summoned to Mr. Sondes' apartment.

"Why have you kept away from me?" she asked: "why have you never come latterly to Hereford Street? Are you so happy yourself, you have not a thought to spare for one of the most miserable women on earth?"

"Is it not safer?" he inquired. He had come straight from his wife's room, and the touch of her hand seemed still on his arm, the traces of her tears were yet on his cheek; but, for all that, he could not help the tone of Etta's voice stealing through every secret winding of his heart. "Is it not safer?"

"Safer," she repeated, scoffingly; "safer! and those are the creatures we love!"

"And whose fault is it," he demanded, "that I am now obliged to say we are safer apart? I would have married you, God and yourself alone knew how willingly, and you would not; you preferred wealth to love, a position to me; you chose, and you cannot have both."

"I know that," she answered sadly; "but you know, Lawrence, why I chose; you know I was not my own mistress; you know it would have been ruin for all of us had I married you, though you never can know — never — how wretched I have been since; how utterly miserable a thing it is for a woman to sell herself beyond recall."

He did not answer her. He stood aloof from the spot she occupied, almost praying that something would occur to interrupt the conversation.

"I am going away," she went on after a pause. "We are to reside abroad for a couple of years. Who knows what may happen before we meet again, or whether we shall ever meet again? You will come to see me before we leave."

"To what purpose?" he asked.

"To what purpose!" she echoed; "that I may bid you good-by; that I may see you once more; that I may talk with you, the only friend I have on earth. It cannot do harm to any human being. Will you come, if only for half an hour?"

But Lawrence only shook his head.

"Are you so fond of your wife as all that comes to?" she demanded.

"I have a wife," he answered; "and though she is

too good for me, I mean to be as worthy of her as I can."

"A sinner never can be worthy of a saint," she replied, with a slight sneer.

"Perhaps not; but even a sinner may love virtue," was the retort.

"In the abstract," she persisted, "but never as an actual presence, Lawrence;" and before he knew what she was about to do, her head was resting on his shoulder, and her face upturned to his. "Lawrence, you have either lied to me, or you are lying to yourself; if you ever love me, you cannot love Olivine; if you love her, you can never have loved me."

She was sobbing passionately; she was kissing him as a woman never can kiss but one man on earth; she drew his lips down to hers, and pressed her own to them over and over again.

While Lawrence — he had never professed to be more than mortal, and this was the only woman he had ever loved! — God help him, he took her to his heart, and forgot everything, his ties and hers, in the happiness of holding her in that lingering embrace once more.

And then, then at that very moment, Olivine, who was gentle in her every movement, turned the handle of the door, and saw them standing in the firelight thus; saw them, he bending over her, she clinging to him, lip meeting lip, hair mingling with hair, hand clasped in hand.

That was enough; she closed the door, and turned blindly into the darkness of the outer apartment; the light staid with them, the darkness with her; and involuntarily she put out her hand to grope her way into the passage.

"It is not his fault, Mrs. Barbour," whispered Percy Forbes, who, having followed her into the antechamber, had seen what she beheld, and now caught her arm and led her down-stairs; "I know her well, and I am certain all this is her doing not his — before God, not his —"

They were in the room where Percy and she had stood that first night after her return from France; but now she sate with her elbows resting on the table, and her head supported by her hands.

"Don't tell him — he must never know," were the only words Percy could catch for a minute or two; then "will you get me some water?" she added; and the hand with which she took the glass from him was steadier than his.

"I will go up-stairs again now," she observed, after a pause; "ring the bell, please, and tell Mary to take lights into the drawing-room first."

"You are a miracle," Percy Forbes remarked; and I think he was right.

It is easy enough for a woman to forgive a man, when she knows how sorely he has been tempted; but it is a fearful struggle for her to command her temper when she only knows how much she has been wronged.

"How white you look, child," Mrs. Gainswoode observed, more than once, during the course of the evening.

"I am tired," at last answered the poor wife, truthfully enough.

"Then let us get home at once," exclaimed Etta, with a smothered yawn; and home accordingly they all proceeded, having severally, if their own account were to be trusted, enjoyed Mrs. Rolte's party intensely.

CHAPTER XV.

Two Leases run out.

From the time when Percy Forbes, after long hesitation, agreed to leave Reach House and try his fortune in Goodman's Fields, Lawrence Barbour proved as good as his word, and tried by every means in his power to meet his partner's views and to carry on the business peaceably and profitably for both.

Never a man existed with whom it was easier to keep on good terms than Percy Forbes. The same sweet careless temper which had enabled him to bear so many crosses patiently, rendered it no difficult matter for him to fall in with the views of any person whose views were even ordinarily reasonable; and accordingly, spite of his fears that he should not find the path of commerce quite so smooth to traverse among vats and refining pans as he had done amidst the timber and masts at the Isle of Dogs, he soon discovered that the new life was as pleasant as the old — pleasanter, indeed, perhaps — for the pace was swifter, the profits by the way greater.

Mr. Forbes lived on the premises, greatly to the astonishment of every one who became in due time acquainted with the fact. Never before, never, had one of the partners in such a concern as that been found humble enough, or proud enough, or indifferent enough, or what you will, to pitch his tent in so miserable a neighbourhood, in such a dingy, cheerless house. "Fit only for a foreman," people were kind enough to tell him in a disparaging sort of tone. But Mr. Forbes

cared very little for what any one told him; and intimated, in his light, indifferent way, that he and Mr. Barbour knew what they were about, that they understood their own business best, and that there were deep mysteries connected with sugar refineries in general, and their Sugar Refinery in particular, with the length and depth and height whereof it was not for the ignorant and uninitiated to meddle.

As for Lawrence Barbour, every other scheme with which he had been connected, every other speculation in which he had been engaged, was abandoned when once Percy Forbes agreed to sail in the same boat with him; not merely to the letter but in the spirit he fulfilled his promise. On the fair land of limited liability he turned his back, not without a sigh; from every enterprise he withdrew, spite of Mr. Alwyn's entreaties, and remonstrances and advice from men whose opinion he valued still more.

Unfortunately, perhaps, for him, he found that money stuck to his fingers from every transaction. He got people to take his shares, he found others willing to step in and fill his place, but still he had promised, and though tempted sorely he kept his promise, and from the city El Dorado fled back to that prosaic region where fortunes are made by hard work instead of by sleight of hand.

He had his hopes, no doubt, of conciliating Mr. Sondes; of making a rapid fortune out of sugars; of being able to sit down better contented with his lot when he had defied Satan and cast the golden nuggets, and the dark-haired enchantress behind him, but if this were the case his hopes were doomed to disappointment.

Mr. Sondes resolutely withdrew the twenty thou-

sand pounds, and utterly, senselessly, as Lawrence considered, invested it in the purchase of the property he had been so long hankering after at Grays; while for the rest fortunes are not made in a twelvemonth out of a concern burdened and swamped with debt; neither in the case of a woman like Etta Gainswoode does out of sight always mean out of mind, more especially when the unloved wife at home has her time fully occupied in looking after an invalid, and cooing over her first child.

Which was a girl and not a boy, greatly to the chagrin, not merely of Mr. Sondes, but also of Lawrence. The former, indeed, had set his heart upon the new-comer belonging to the worthier sex, with a persistency which proved a source of much discomfort to Olivine; but after a time both father and grand-uncle became reconciled to the little daughter, who crowed and laughed and grew apace, after a fashion calculated to delight the hearts of all who had the happiness of living in the house with her.

"Call her Olivine," entreated the sick man, but the mother demurred, averring it would cause a confusion of names, and lead to complications innumerable. Nevertheless, at length that objection was overruled, and the infant introduced to Christian society as Olivine Maude.

"Perhaps you would like her christened 'Ada,'" suggested Olivine to her husband, a little mischievously, in answer to which he kissed her, and remarked he was glad to see her old spirits were coming back again.

"For somehow, my dearest," he remarked, "you have been sadly down-hearted lately;" whereupon the

poor creature took his hand in hers, and bent her head over it to hide the tears she could not keep from springing. She had never told him a sentence of what her eyes beheld that night — more was the pity.

What he said she felt to be perfectly true. She had been down-hearted and dispirited; a dull companion, perhaps; an uncheerful wife. She could not avoid thinking about her husband's attachment for another woman; she could not help knowing that, let his affection be as sinless as it would, it was still so much love taken from her; so much slight put upon her — then her uncle's illness and her own delicate health. Yes, she had been dull, and stupid, and mopish, but now a child was born to her she would be different, she resolved she would.

But somehow, let her be as different as she would, she never could fill up that void in her husband's heart which had once been occupied by Etta Gainswoode; and after a few months had passed over, she felt in her heart that her worst fears were being realised; that Lawrence did not love her as she loved him; that marriage had not brought her the happiness she expected; that there was yet an inner chamber in the nature of the man to whom she was bound for better for worse, which she could never hope to enter.

Well, whether the day be rainy or sunshiny, we have all to get through the hours as best we can; whether the biting east wind chills us to the bones, or the fresh balmy west fans our temples lovingly, the toil appointed for us, the labour set for us, the allotted task, the wearying work, has to be performed; and in like manner, let a woman's life be bright with happi-

ness, or dull and dim with misery, it has to be lived — the years have to be got through somehow.

It is a philosophy most people learn as they walk onwards towards the end, that if the burden of the years must be borne, it is well to carry the load patiently and in silence; but there are few so young as Olivine was, in the days of which I am now writing, who could accept the inevitable as meekly as she did.

"I am better than she is, at any rate," the rebellious little heart thought at times, adding to itself next minute, "but, then, if he does not believe it, what is the use — what is the use?"

She knew he did not see anything of Mrs. Gainswoode, but Olivine gave her husband little credit for this, remembering Etta was abroad, and thinking Lawrence could not visit the siren if he would.

It never occurred to the child to consider that, if her husband wished to play truant, France was not quite at the ends of the earth, but rather easily accessible from England than otherwise.

Many a time he had felt tempted to make a business journey the excuse for looking in Etta's face once more, but his wife did not know anything either of the temptation or the resistance, and judged or misjudged him accordingly.

So, likewise, did Percy Forbes, who, seeing foreign letters directed in Etta's well-remembered hand-writing coming to the office for Lawrence, drew his own conclusions concerning the position of affairs; but, whatever he thought or surmised, he kept to himself. From the night of Ada Perkins' wedding, Mrs. Gainswoode's name was never mentioned between him and Olivine.

By mutual consent, as it seemed, they refrained from venturing on this dangerous ground, and so time went by till, at last, the lease of the old house in Stepney Causeway lapsed, and the owner intimated his intention of building over the pleasant garden, and of running up a street where fruit-trees had been trained, and flowers had bloomed and withered.

Where should they go? at once became an important question. Grays was not to be thought of for more than three months in the year; not, at least, if Lawrence were to come to business daily; another house in Stepney he vowed he never would consent to live in; some person suggested one of the stuccoed dwellings in the Commercial Road, or a genteel semi-detached villa out at Bow, or round by Victoria Park, the very mention of which localities drove Lawrence almost to frenzy.

"Why do you not tell me to look for a second floor in Ratcliffe Highway? I would just as soon live in one part of the East-End as another."

After this retort, the troubler of his peace who had himself, he declared, as sweet a place as the heart of man need desire over near Hackney Wick, desisted from his efforts, and merely ventured to wonder, "Why, if he did not like the east, he had not thought of going west."

"Because it is such a confounded way off my business," answered Lawrence; "because it is too far to walk; because I hate omnibuses; because I am scarcely rich enough to afford to keep a carriage."

"Has it never crossed your mind that if you lived up or down the river, you could get to London Bridge by the twopenny boat?"

"No," replied Lawrence; "but I will not forget the fact now," which he said in order to get rid of his persecutor, after whom he hurled an imprecation that made Percy Forbes laugh outright, and remark he did not believe there ever was a man who got so much good advice as his partner, nor one who hated it so cordially.

"And you know," answered Lawrence, who could not avoid laughing himself at his ebullition of temper, "the beauty of it is, Mr. Sondes has not the remotest intention of leaving Stepney Causeway. He talks about the desirability of looking at other houses, and sympathises with Olivine's distress concerning there not being a place in which to give Miss Maude an airing, but sure am I nevertheless that the old gentleman intends to end his days in Stepney Causeway if he can."

"I think you are right there," returned Percy; "and I think also that he will accomplish his wish, for I do not fancy there is any present intention of pulling down the old house. Has Mrs. Barbour any idea of how ill he really is? It has often occurred to me lately she has not the slightest notion of how near the grave he stands."

"She had Sherfield down the other day to see him," answered Lawrence.

"And did he tell her?" inquired the other.

"Of course he did not," retorted Lawrence a little scornfully; "a doctor might speak the truth to me, or to you, or to a patient, but he never would to a woman who cries, and Olivine I know was in a terrible state of fright and despair that day. Doctor Sherfield said it was only one of the old attacks, and bade her not

be uneasy, and praised the baby, and observed it was like its mother, after which kind and polite remarks he drove away, leaving my wife comforted. Now she thinks the danger is past for a while; and upon my word, Forbes, I do not think there is any immediate cause for fear. I do not see why he should not go on living for years yet. Do you?"

Percy shook his head. "Mr. Sondes will never live through the winter," he remarked.

"Do you really believe it?" asked Lawrence.

"I am sure of it," was the reply; and Percy watched his partner while he walked slowly out of the counting-house, hands plunged deep in his pockets, and eyes bent down to the ground, while he considered what change in his position this death would bring.

"Mr. Sondes struck wofully near the mark," thought Percy, as he turned to his work again. "Thank God I am not looking for a legacy from any one. After all, there is an awful vein of badness in the best specimens of our humanity, and I would not answer for the disinterestedness of anybody now, not even for my own. I wonder if, when I am old and feeble, some one will long to pull the shoes off my feet, and be thinking I have worn them too long? It is for that end most probably I am now rising up so early and so late taking rest; it is for that I am making haste to be rich, and running the risk of dyspepsia by working immediately after dinner; it is for that, and not for home, or wife, or child! I will leave all I have to found a model workhouse, or alms-houses like Bancroft's. No, I won't," the man added, almost with a shudder, for at the thought of Bancroft there came before him a vision of that ghastly tomb in Great St.

Helen's, where lies the extortioner, with glass over his face, crumbling away to dust.

"I will garner in wealth, and then I will travel and seek me a wife," he finished; but all the time he was sketching a profile on his paper like unto the profile of Lawrence Barbour's wife.

A week passed by, and still Mr. Sondes was no better; another week, and Dr. Sherfield assured Lawrence he must grow worse, that there was no help for it, that already the patient had lingered far beyond the time he thought it possible for him to survive when he saw him at Reach House.

After the doctor departed, Olivine came, praying Lawrence to tell her what the great man said. "Will he soon be better?" she asked. "How long does Dr. Sherfield say will it be before the effect of that last attack passes off?"

"He does not know," her husband answered, vaguely.

"Does not know?" she repeated. "How stupid he must be!"

"My dear child, doctors cannot perform miracles."

"Do you mean that it will be a work of time, and nursing, and nourishment more than of medicine? or that ——" she clasped her hands together, and stopped suddenly. Something in the expression of Lawrence's face told her the truth.

"My love," he began; but she could not hear a word he said, her sobs came so thick and fast.

"Oh! Lawrence, oh! Lawrence," and she laid her head on his breast, and cried there, as though her heart were breaking, just as she had cried in his arms that night when she was still a child, and he a mere youth,

when he had no thought of either marrying her, or loving Etta Alwyn!

From that hour Olivine scarcely ever left her uncle's side. Husband and child seemed for the time almost forgotten in her despairing devotion to the dying man. Happily, perhaps, for her, he was for long before his death almost unconscious. He had been so long on the journey that ere he reached the grave the man seemed literally dead. In his case there could be no pathetic leave-takings, no lingering good-byes, no passionate farewells, no encouragement to mutual sorrow, no fierce struggle for life, no mournful reminiscence, no sadly sweet whisperings in the mournful twilight, no talks through the darkness of the night concerning the far-off land, and that city which hath no need of the sun, nor of the moon to shine in it, no half-spoken words of comfort and thankfulness, of fear and hope, of mortal agony and immortal joy.

Watching and dying; these two occupations went on hour after hour, day after day; his life ebbed out like the sea, slowly but surely — so slowly that Olivine could not see how each moment the waves were leaving the sands of time barer and drier, yet so surely, that, although she was unable to tell how the tide of his existence receded to mingle its waters with the depths of the great ocean, she could still perceive from morning till evening, and from evening to midnight, that he was worse, that the dreaded end was drawing very nigh.

Nevertheless, when that end did come she failed to recognise it. Worn out with watching, she had fallen into a troubled sleep, from which she was aroused by

hearing her own name spoken twice, softly and yet distinctly.

"Olivine!" and her heart gave a great leap. For a moment she thought in her folly that the tide might turn even then. "Olivine!" the sick man repeated.

"I am here," she answered, passing round to the other side of the bed, on which he was lying with his face turned towards the window and his wasted arms stretched forth as if attempting to grasp something beyond his reach.

"I am here," she repeated, with a great terror coming over her, for he never took any notice of her words, nor glanced towards her, nor changed his posture in the least.

"Olivine!" and the voice grew fainter.

"I am here, uncle; what is it?" and she put her arms round his neck and kissed his lips, which were cold as ice. "Don't you know me, uncle?" she whispered: "I am Olivine," and she waited, and held her breath, and listened all in vain. No sound broke the solemn stillness that ensued. The man was dead, and, kneeling beside him, Olivine at length knew it was not on her he had called, but rather on another Olivine, whom it may be in that supreme moment, he, standing on the very verge of earth, beheld waiting for him on the Eternal Shores.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Pace increases.

UNDER the shadow of her own figurative vine and fig tree — eastern luxuries which were represented at Old Ford by a hop-plant and a mulberry — Ada Reeves (*née* Perkins) had resided in peace for four years, from the time when, with the consent of all parties interested, she bestowed herself and her fortune on Henry, the beloved of her heart; and at the period when I take up the thread of my story again, she was fast developing into a fat and somewhat untidy matron, who remembered events by the ages of her children, — who occupied herself greatly in yearly alterations of the census, — who prided herself on having an infinitely better house filled with more costly furniture than had ever been aspired to by her maternal parent, — who drove out on Sundays, Good Fridays, Whit-Mondays, and Saturday afternoons, in "the chaise" with Henry and her baby, — who went often to see her mother and criticise the appointments of Distaff Yard, — who was very good-natured towards her brothers and sisters, and had always one or more of them staying with her for change of air, — who still affected enormous crinolines and wonderful frizettes, — who wore large ear-rings and was fond of plaids, — who bought bonnets ornamented with much scarlet for winter wear, and pink silk bonnets for summer "outings," and who was, in one word, a perfectly fair type of a class which is to be met with in all parts of London, but the manners and habits and modes of thought whereof are as unintelligible

to the superior classes, as the writing over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the King's palace, proved to Belshazzar in that hour when he made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand.

Occasionally she was kind enough to pay a visit to Olivine — indeed, she seemed to think that whenever a new baby was old enough to be taken a drive, Mrs. Barbour ought to see it first: a courtesy which Olivine received as intended, greatly to Mrs. Reeves' contentment and elation of spirit.

By reason of these visits to "an old friend who lived up at the West End," Ada held a certain exalted station among her husband's relations and her own new acquaintances at Old Ford. Not to every one is it given to have "anybody intimate" who has an 'ouse up nigh the Marble Arch; neither, as a rule, if East Enders have that intimate, does such a fashionable lady usually request her unfashionable visitor to have afternoon tea, and desire her maid to see that the nurse is made comfortable.

Yet in all these matters Olivine gratified the desires of Mrs. Henry Reeves' heart. She talked to the babies; she praised them to their mother; she listened to Ada's ecstasies; she inquired concerning Mrs. Perkins; she was interested in Mr. Reeves' business prospects; she liked to know about the young brothers and sisters who were getting on so well at school; and then, perhaps, when it was all over — when Mrs. Henry Reeves, having made her adieux, had descended to her cab, and departed to report at Old Ford the wonders she had seen in Gloucester Street — Olivine liked best of all going into her own nursery, and taking her children

to her breast and thinking how much nicer they were than anybody else's children, as is the way of mothers — God bless their loving, partial hearts.

Her children were all the comfort she had in those weary days of which I am now writing; over the record of which I would fain hurry; for Mr. Sondes' death put division between her husband and her. From the hour his will was read, Lawrence became a changed man.

The will was this: Gerrard's Hall — that property previously mentioned as situated near Grays — a place Lawrence cordially detested, because it was out of the way, and somewhat lonely, and decidedly unprofitable — to Percy Forbes, sugar refiner, and Gabriel King, lawyer, in trust, for the sole and separate use of his beloved niece Olivine Barbour, during the term of her natural life. After which said property was to pass to the eldest son of his said niece, or failing such son, to the eldest daughter surviving at the time of the said Olivine's decease. And further, Mr. Sondes devised all the money, and houses, and lands, of which at the time of his death he should be seised, "to his said beloved niece Olivine Barbour, under restrictions and subject to the following conditions, namely —" These conditions being utterly to deprive Lawrence of all hope or chance of ever being a penny the better for his wife's property.

He was "cut out" in fact, as he put it to Mr. Perkins. Whereupon his kinsman remarked, —

"I suppose you did not marry her for her money?"

"No," answered Lawrence in his rage; "but, by—, if I had thought it would have been this way, I would

have asked the first beggar I met in the street to marry me sooner than Mr. Sondes' niece."

And he said hard things to Olivine herself, who ran off straightway to Percy Forbes, asking him whether she could not give Lawrence the whole of her fortune.

"You cannot, Mrs. Barbour," he answered; "that was the reason of your uncle's will ——"

"Poor uncle!" she exclaimed, and then fell to sobbing, till Percy wished there was no such thing as money in the world — at least "not for women to have to do with," he corrected himself.

"I certainly think you ought to have had a portion of that money," he said to Lawrence on one occasion.

"Among you, you have taken damned good care I should not be much the better for marrying an heiress," retorted Lawrence, who could be vehement enough now the drag on his temper was removed by Mr. Sondes' death; and this idea was nourished by Etta Gainswoode, who, on the very day of the funeral, wrote entreating her old lover to come to her "immediately."

"For my father has had a paralytic stroke," explained the distracted fair; "and my husband is dangerously ill. Come at once, if you can come at all." To which request Lawrence, nothing loath, acceded; and found, when he arrived at Mallingford, that Etta desired he should attend to numberless matters of business for her.

"With all these companies, you see," she said, "my father is connected: you must keep matters right for him till he is a little better. Will you, for

the sake of old times?" she added, with the same bewitching smile, with the same irresistible manner, which had lured him on to destruction in days gone by.

What passed at Mallingford between them, Olivine drove herself almost wild by conjecturing; and yet it was all harmless enough.

A few words of hopeless attachment; a few sighs over the inevitable; a few words of sympathy; of anger at Mr. Sondes' injustice; of wonder at Olivine for not having insisted on things being different; a few kisses; a tender leave-taking: these were all; and yet, though all, these were sufficient for much harm to come out of them afterwards.

A narrow hall may lead into a spacious house; through a very small crack, a great stream can force its way. And so, perhaps, on the whole, Olivine had cause for her sleepless nights and anxious days.

Even when a wife is loved, there is oftentime food for jealousy; and here the wife had never been loved, alas! for the young creature who was now, for the second time, a mother.

"And he has never seen you yet, darling," she sobbed over the child, another girl, who was born while Lawrence still lingered on at Mallingford.

"I wish it had been a boy, for your sake," she remarked, deprecatingly, when at length he returned to Stepney Causeway.

"What can it matter?" was the reply. "Son or daughter, your uncle has taken care they shall not go through life penniless."

"And is it not a comfort to know they are amply provided for?" Olivine inquired, timidly.

"Not to me," he answered; "it is never pleasant to

a man to feel wife and children are entirely independent of him."

And so the breach went on widening, from day to day, and from month to month.

Lawrence would have nothing to do with the place at Grays; but, declaring he would rather live in his "own house," moved his wife and family to Gloucester Street, Portman Square, and only suffered Olivine to visit her property at rare and uncertain intervals.

"I cannot think what has come to him," Mrs. Barbour remarked, over and over again, to Percy Forbes, who of necessity saw much of her in those days; "he seems so strange and so altered; and I scarcely ever can get speaking to him, Mr. Forbes, he is so much occupied at your detestable refinery."

"Pray do not call our gold mine ugly names," Percy entreated, and so turned the conversation aside. Well he knew it was not business — at least, not any legitimate business — which kept Lawrence away from home, but rather in the mornings Mr. Alwyn's affairs, and in the evenings Etta Gainswoode, who returned to Hereford Street six months after Mr. Sondes' death, a wealthy, handsome widow.

Those were the days in which Mr. Forbes found it no easy matter to agree with his partner Barbour, in which every new invention the mind of man devised was tried on the sugars in Goodman's Fields, and declared to have failed simply because Percy was ignorant, or prejudiced, or old-fashioned, or a simpleton.

"If I could have cleared off those mortgages,"

Lawrence exclaimed one day, "you should have seen what pushing a business along really is."

"I am quite satisfied with the trade we are doing, if you would but let well alone," answered his partner.

"Because you are content to drone on all your life, making just enough to buy butter for your bread. As for me, I must make some change. I cannot go on feeling my wife is richer than myself — feeling this cursed concern will never give me the chance of growing wealthy like other men. Look at Mr. Alwyn; why he has coined, literally coined, the last five years; and if I had the value of my share here I could do as well. I wish I was clear of this concern."

"You can be clear in a week," answered Percy Forbes. "Lately it has not been either any great pleasure or any great help having you for a partner. Excepting to interfere, and cause some disagreement, you have never for months past entered the place. I told you how it would be before I ever left Reach Works; but you refused to listen to any objection. Now that I am here, however — now that I have put every sixpence I possess in the world into the concern, and given my time and labour to extending our connection, I have no intention of giving up the place to you. If you are not satisfied with the amount of profits we divide — if you think you can do better with your money elsewhere — take your money and go. Only, if you decide to stay, I tell you I will not have the method of manufacture changed every week. You are a very clever man, I know, but, upon my soul, it has seemed to me lately that you are a clever man gone mad."

"Do you mean to say you could pay me out?" asked Lawrence, ignoring the latter part of Mr. Forbes' sentence.

"Yes, within a week."

"With my wife's money, I suppose," conjectured Lawrence, with a bitter oath. "You did a fine thing for yourself when you dictated the terms of that will, and got the entire control of Mrs. Barbour's fortune."

Very deliberately Percy Forbes rose from his desk, and seized his partner by the throat.

"Will you apologise?" he said; and he shook Lawrence as a dog might shake a rat.

"No," Lawrence gasped, and he struck Percy a blow across the face with all his might.

"Take the consequences, then," answered the other, and he dragged him out of the counting-house and down the steps leading into the yard, and along the yard towards the great gates.

"Open them," said Mr. Forbes, addressing one of the workmen, and pointing to the gates.

"Do at your peril," shouted Lawrence, struggling to release himself from Percy's grasp.

By this time nearly every person employed on the premises had rushed down into the yard to see what was the matter, and a dozen people now sprang forward to do Percy's bidding.

"Are you all cowards?" cried Lawrence; "don't you see the fool is killing me?" and he made another desperate effort, whilst a few of the men came forward to his assistance.

"Stand back," cried Percy, at this juncture. "Stand back, I am not hurting him; though if I were, he

would be only getting his deserts;" and as he spoke he dragged him on over the stones towards the gates, which were now unlocked.

"Go for the police!" ordered Lawrence.

"Go for them yourself," retorted Percy, "and remember it is only for your wife's sake I have refrained from kicking you off the premises;" and with that he pushed his partner into the street, and closed the gates upon him.

"Give me the keys," he said. "Now, where is Flynton?"

With a pale, scared face, the foreman stepped forward.

"Stop all work as soon as possible," went on Mr. Forbes, "and let the men go home. The Refinery is closed till some arrangement about its future management can be come to between Mr. Barbour and me."

Never in Goodman's Fields had any occurrence — not even a murder — taken place which caused so much excitement as this quarrel at the Eagle Refinery. At least a hundred versions of it were circulated; and many men, honourable and of good standing in the City, came to remonstrate with Percy Forbes on the scandal he had occasioned, and offering to try to arrange matters (as they put it) between him and his partner.

To these friendly offers, however, Percy returned but one answer: he was sorry for his violence, but yet, under similar provocation, he could not say that he should not again act in a similar manner. If Mr. Barbour were willing to retract his words, he, Mr. Forbes, would apologise for the force he had employed; but fellow workers they could never be more.

He was perfectly willing to submit the whole case to arbitration, and either leave the concern altogether, or else pay Mr. Barbour whatever sum the gentlemen they might respectively name should consider fair.

He felt it was a bad business, but he considered what had occurred unavoidable. He had never wished to go into partnership with Mr. Barbour, but the thing was forced on him. He had no objection to shake hands with his late partner, but he thought his late partner would greatly object to shake hands with him.

In this last supposition, however, Percy found he was mistaken. Influenced probably by the advice of friends, and by the intense desire he felt to stand well in the opinion of City circles, Lawrence, after some time, agreed to go through the ceremony of reconciliation. He withdrew the accusation which had irritated Mr. Forbes; and Mr. Forbes, on his part, expressed his regret for having given way to temper. Then Sir Thomas Jonson, Knight and Wharfinger, in whose office these little amenities took place, entreated his dear young friends to shake hands, which his friends did, very much after the fashion of two children who have been threatened with condign punishment if they refuse to kiss and be good.

How far this reconciliation was to be relied on may nevertheless be guessed from two or three words that passed between the pair while they walked together through the outer office.

"You have beaten me so far, I suppose you think," Lawrence said, in a low angry whisper; "but I have got my head now, thank Heaven, and we

shall see which of us will reach the winning-post first."

"Is it a challenge?" asked Percy fiercely.

"If you like to take it so," was the reply.

"And the bet?" demanded the other.

He never could tell what made the words pass his lips, but they did for all that.

"My life against a thousand pounds," retorted Lawrence.

"What may you estimate the value of your life at?" demanded Percy.

"Not much; but just at this much — I will either die or win."

"I wish you would die," thought Percy Forbes, after they parted; "and as for the winning-post, you have got my prize already."

From that moment, however, the two men worked as they had never worked before. The Eagle Refinery was almost forced to return higher profits than had hitherto been the case. The Distaff Yard concern was driven along the road to wealth — fresh blood being infused into it by increased capital, by ceaseless supervision.

Even Mr. Perkins began in those days to dream dreams; and taking up his parable, prophesied about his dying a great man yet.

And not in Distaff Yard only did Lawrence make himself busy. He had got his head, so he said, and as a spirited horse released from control gallops madly on over every obstacle, so in those days Lawrence ran a course of speculation through which nothing but his own clear intellect, his indomitable perseverance, and his amazing good fortune could have carried him safely.

Where other riders would have been afraid to leap, he still came down sound and prosperous on the other side. His house in Gloucester Street was the resort of men who had schemes to float, of capitalists who desired to make their hundreds of thousands more.

It was a mad life, but one just suited to Lawrence's nature for all that.

He could see the growth of his wealth, could tell the extent of his gains from day to day, almost from hour to hour. Never but once did he get a check. There came a sudden call for money, and every hundred he had was locked up fast.

"I think Olivine could get the amount I need for me, if she liked," he thought; and accordingly he jumped into a hansom cab and drove off to the Fenchurch Street Station, whence he took train for Grays, anathematising the slow rate at which the engine steamed along as it lingered along the marshes and stopped at every little village by the way.

Gerrard's Hall lay back in the country some miles from Grays, and after he left the train, Lawrence had first to wait for a fly being got ready, and then to endure that tranquil, lame mode of progression which old country horses delight in — till, his patience being at length exhausted, he stopped the conveyance, and saying he could walk quicker, alighted and pursued the remainder of the distance on foot.

Although Lawrence had never liked Gerrard's Hall, it was a very lovely residence, with long avenues of trees stretching away over the park, with sunny gardens, with sloping lawns, with great vistas of wilderness and pasture, where cattle grazed in a state of perfect happiness and peace; and something of all this struck him,

perhaps, as he entered the domain, and contrasted the silence and repose around with the din and turmoil of the great city he had just left.

In one of the grassy avenues he beheld Olivine and the children, who, at sight of their father, broke out into tumultuous screams of delight, and rushed towards him at the top of their speed. They were both such tiny creatures that Olivine could have kept up with them easily, had she chosen to do so, but the days were gone in which she had hastened to meet her husband. There had come that between them which was breaking her heart — knowledge on her part of his utter want of affection for her — of his devoted attachment to another woman.

He had said hard things to her — he had been cruel and unkind; he had told her how little it signified to him where she lived, since by her senseless jealousy she banished the only friends he had in the world from his house. She had wept her tears, she had made her protest; when he did at intervals come to Gerrard's Hall, there was no companionship nor confidence between them.

"It will all come right, some day," Percy Forbes assured her; but she had almost ceased hoping that Lawrence would ever be kind and tender to her again.

And yet as she drew nearer to the place where he stood caressing his children, a sudden ray of sunshine fell across her heart. He came forward with such a pleasant smile, his manner was so almost loving; he looked around the lawn, with so changed and altered an expression, that the young thing's heart beat faster, thinking Percy's words were going to come true at

last — that Lawrence was getting tired of strange homes and strange faces, and had come back to her to rest.

"Lawrence, I am so glad to see you," she ventured; "I have been so lonely. It is three whole weeks since you were down before — three whole weeks, my darling," and she slipped her hand into his, and looked up in his face with tears in her eyes, and nestled close to him in a manner half confiding, half fearful; while he answered —

"Well, it shall not be three weeks again, Olivine." At which assurance she smiled hopefully, and carrying his hand to her lips, kissed it, spite of his remonstrances, and complimentary assurance, that for her to touch his hand with her lips was but wasting their sweetness.

And the sunshine lay in great patches on the grass, and the trees waved their branches over the pair, and the children toddled on together hand-in-hand towards the house, and Olivine's soul was so full of happiness, she scarce knew how to contain herself.

"Will you send the children away, Olivine?" he said, as they entered the pleasant drawing-room, with its wonderful ceiling, and gilt and painted coats-of-arms which had struck Mr. Sondes' fancy more than anything else about the house — "I want to speak to you particularly."

"What is the matter — is anything wrong?" she asked, moving towards the bell-rope; there came a sudden cloud across the sky at the moment — the sun went in — and it seemed to Olivine at the same time that the gladness faded out of her heart likewise. "Is anything wrong?"

"No," he answered; "only I want you to do me a favour."

"It is money, then?" she said; and she bade the children run away to meet their nurse, while she herself recrossed the room, and, taking a chair near her husband, waited to hear what he needed.

"A mere trifle," he told her. "She could get Forbes to sell out for a short time. She should have the whole amount back in three months at latest, and it would be the greatest comfort to him possible — prevent his having to make any sacrifice to raise the required sum." And so he ran on, rapidly and kindly enough, while she listened like one in a dream, with one thought beating into her brain, till she felt almost mad: "He would not have come had he not needed this money. He would not have come." And when he ended — when he paused for her to answer, out of her very disappointment there came the cry, "Oh! I wish I had never had a penny in the world, then I might have been married for myself, and not for my fortune."

"And who dare say I married you for your fortune?" demanded Lawrence.

"I do," she returned; "I say you never loved me. I say you like the very ground another woman walks on. I say you have been repenting your marriage to me every day since she was left a widow, and that I would rather you went and lived with her altogether than only come to me when you want something — than only speak kind words to me when you have an object to gain."

"Have I not warned you, Olivine, that I do not

choose Mrs. Gainswoode's name to be mentioned between us?" he asked, sternly.

"Yes; but I shall mention it if I choose, and I shall say what I please concerning her. She has taken you from me; whatever poor measure of love you once gave me she has stolen away. If she had let you alone, I think you might have loved me — I think you might."

"You are a reasonable woman," remarked her husband; "and you evince at times a charming temper. This storm is apparently about nothing except the few thousands of which I stand in need — a trumpery sum that, if I were to go and ask Mrs. Gainswoode to advance me, she would sell her jewels rather than refuse."

"Then you had better go and ask her," retorted Olivine; "for you know it is not in my power to give or to withhold. If you think Mrs. Gainswoode so much more liberal than your own wife, why do you come to me at all? why do you not stay with her entirely?"

"Do you know what you are saying, Olivine?" he inquired; "do you not know that, let our married life have been miserable as it may, I have at any rate remained faithful to you?"

"Then you might as well not have been faithful," Olivine answered.

"That is what I have often thought myself," he replied; and he left the room and the house, and went straight back to London.

It was some time before Olivine could realise to herself that he was actually gone; but when she had searched the house and the grounds, and heard more-

over from one of the men that he had met Mr. Barbour half-way on his road to Grays, a terrible repentance came over her, and she sent a special messenger off to town with two notes, one for Percy Forbes, praying him to come to her — another to Lawrence, saying she was sorry, and begging him to return.

When the messenger returned, he said both Mr. Forbes and Mr. Barbour were out, but that he had left the notes.

Next day Mr. Forbes appeared at Gerrard's Hall, listened to all Olivine had to say, and then remarked, he was willing to do what he could, but that he thought all their endeavours would be useless, as he understood Lawrence had gone to Paris to seek the assistance of some great capitalist with whom he was connected.

In the middle of their conversation Mrs. Perkins was announced; she came in weeping, and called Olivine a "poor dear" and an "innocent lamb." She kissed her very vehemently, and then sat down and sighed. Utterly regardless of Mr. Forbes' presence, and of the signs that gentleman was making to her, she said she had come out straight away because she thought it would be a comfort to Mrs. Barbour's poor 'art to have somebody she could speak to.

"And I can assure you, my dear, we all feels for you," went on this Job's comforter. "When 'Enery Reeves told Josiah about it, he went out of the yard like a man possessed."

"Will you tell me what you are talking of, Mrs. Perkins?" asked Olivine. "Mr. Forbes, what is the matter — has Mrs. Perkins gone mad?"

"No, my dear, I ain't mad, though I wish I was

for your sake," Mrs. Perkins made answer, though Percy Forbes motioned her not to speak.

"And so you don't know, you poor lamb, with a couple of, so to say, fatherless children? My dear, your husband's off to France with Mrs. Gainswoode."

"It is not true!" Olivine cried, rising, as though she could refute the slander better standing.

"Well, if it ain't, then all I can say is 'Enery Reeves saw them going off by the Dover and Calais express, first-class with his own two eyes."

"And with all my heart and soul, then, I wish he had been born blind," exclaimed Percy, as he caught Olivine in his arms. "She has fainted," he added.

"Poor dear, she'll have to come out of that and know the worst," moralised Mrs. Perkins; and Mrs. Perkins' prophecy proved true. Olivine had to come back to life and face the long, lonely, hopeless months, during which she heard nothing of Lawrence — during which she lived in desolate state in the home her uncle's wealth had provided for her.

CHAPTER XVII.

Might have been expected.

Time went by, and still there came to Gerrard's Hall no tidings of Lawrence Barbour. Had his place never known him — had he never married a wife — had children never been born to him, he could not have dropped out of his old haunts more completely.

Never in banks or warehouses was he now beheld; never did he bend his steps due East and hold discourse with Mr. Perkins about the best means to cheat

the analyzers — about the safest mode of manufacturing some fresh counterfeit.

When he had to come into the City he drove there in a brougham, and hurried from carriage to office like a man in dread of being arrested. When he walked about the West End, he chose unfrequented streets and silent squares. Had it been possible for him to avoid doing so, not an hour would he have stayed on English ground.

Abroad he could forget his sin; at home it seemed continually to be staring him in the face. "You have deserted your wife!" the very newsboys seemed to shout in his ear. "What about Olivine?" his conscience never ceased whispering; "is this the way in which you fulfil your promise? Do you forget it? You said you would be all to her — all her dead uncle was. How long is it since you have seen your wife? How long is it since you have heard from her? What is she doing — what is she thinking — what is she suffering?" and then Lawrence turned fiercely on his second self, and bade it be still. "She is happier without me," he decided. "She has her fortune — her children. If she wanted to hear from me, she would write; as it is, not a line — no, not one."

After awhile the whim seized him that he would go and see his father — the old man whom he had long neglected, and he started accordingly for Mallingford, only to find when he arrived there the Clay farm-house shut, and no one living in it except a caretaker.

"Mr. Barbour was gone," this person said; "gone with a young lady dressed in mourning, who came down one day and persuaded him to go back to Lon-

don with her. Mr. Barbour had been very ill," the man further informed Lawrence, "and my Lord Lallard had ridden over to inquire about him regular, and had sent his own carriage to take him and the young lady to the station."

"And my brother?" Lawrence inquired.

"He was here in the summer time, sir, but I have not seen him since. They do say as how he is going to be married, but like as not it is only talk."

"Why was I not told of my father's illness and removal?" Lawrence angrily exclaimed.

"I am sure I cannot tell, sir," answered the man; "only I did hear him say something about casting you off as he did the earth of Mallingford. He was in a terrible state, but the young lady cried and took on so dreadful, that he gave in at last; and that was all, sir — that was all, indeed."

Having culled which pleasant herbs to flavour the dish of his life for a day or two, Lawrence walked back to the station, where he met Lord Lallard face to face.

There had been a time when his Lordship would have greeted his old acquaintance cordially, but now he merely bowed coldly to the younger man, and sedulously avoided taking his seat in the carriage Lawrence selected; while the Rector, who came bustling on to the platform a few minutes before the train started, and exchanged confidences with Lord Lallard before subsiding into a second-class compartment, as befitted his means rather than his inclination, declined to see his old pupil at all. Lawrence, as a repentant prodigal, might have been not merely tolerated, but considered interesting. The picture of a sinner eating

husks and tending swine, clothed in vile raiment, has ever had charms for those who are averse to the idea of vice lording it in purple and fine linen; but this sinner not merely was above husks, but travelled first-class, and had his "Times" and a railway rug, and happened to be very well clad indeed: for all of which reasons the Rector felt it his duty to pass him by, and Lawrence never blamed him for his neglect.

He picked no quarrel with the world in those days for its treatment of him. Rather, perhaps, though its coldness was as salt rubbed into an open wound, he thought better of the world than he had ever done.

For the first time in his life, he found that money was not everything — that it could not purchase everything — that although it might gild the exterior of vice, it could not, in the eyes of honest men and women, make vice appear like virtue.

Now he was wealthy — now he was regarded by commercial circles as one of fortune's favourites. Since he parted company with Percy Forbes he had touched nothing but what repaid him three or four hundred per cent. At last he had found the true El Dorado — the alchemist's secret. Under his touch, the most unpromising ventures became perfect mines of gold. He was regarded as a lucky man — one of those with whom the former Rothschild would have loved to be associated. Speculators sought him, capitalists bore him off in triumph to dinner, clerks were deferential to him, plodding business-folks discoursed to one another of Lawrence Barbour's rise, and sighed. How he had entered London at twenty without a sovereign in his pocket, and risen long before middle age to the position he had

attained — these things were talked of in omnibus or steamer, in counting-houses and coffee-rooms; and yet — the old friends who had given him their hands and bade him God speed in the days of his struggling apprenticeship to business, would scarcely acknowledge him now.

He had sinned, and not even his reputed wealth could cover that sin away from the sight of those in whose eyes most of all he desired to stand well.

These things passed through Lawrence's mind as the train steamed out of the station, and sped away past Mallingford End, and so on to London.

There were two strangers in the same compartment with him who had journeyed from further down the line, and when the woods of Mallingford came in sight, the pair began talking of the property and its recent occupier.

The Barbours, Mr. Alwyn, Mr. Gainswoode, all these persons were discussed as people do discuss such matters, heedless of who may be listening; and by degrees the talk came round to the child minor and Mrs. Gainswoode herself.

Then Lawrence's own name was mentioned. Reading the *Times* with apparent interest, he heard his rise described, his position canvassed. There were hard things said of him, and harder of Etta. At the moment he would have given all he was worth to have possessed courage sufficient to say, "I am Lawrence Barbour, and I warn you, at your peril, to speak another word against Mrs. Gainswoode;" but he could not do it; and at last the conversation drifted to other subjects until Shoreditch was reached and the passengers disappeared, some

in cabs, some on foot, some by omnibus, to their respective destinations.

Never before, perhaps, had Lawrence felt such a repugnance to returning home, and for this reason, rejecting all offers of conveyance, he crossed Shoreditch, and, railway-rug on arm, walked slowly along Wilson Street and made his way thence to Clerkenwell, through which enlivening locality he was proceeding, when he met the last person he desired to see, or expected to see in such a neighbourhood, face to face.

"Good evening," said Percy Forbes, for the recognition was mutual as it was sudden, and he made a movement as though he intended to stop.

"Good evening," muttered Lawrence Barbour, quickening his pace and hurrying on. For a second Percy Forbes looked back after the retreating figure; but then he pursued his way Cityward.

There is in Clerkenwell, just at the corner of Elm Street, a triangular bit of ground, which, in common with the site occupied by the House of Correction is called, as if in a sort of ghastly jest, "Mount Pleasant." As he was crossing the open part of this triangle, Lawrence became conscious that some one was running behind him, and half turning to see who the person in such a hurry might be, he again beheld his old partner.

"Give me a minute, Barbour," Percy entreated, and Lawrence agreeing, the pair turned out of the regular road and walked slowly together up the left-hand side of the triangle.

"I want to ask you something," Mr. Forbes went on, "something that perhaps you will say is no business

of mine. Did you get a letter from your wife, either during the time you were abroad or else immediately after your return?"

"No," Lawrence answered.

"And yet she sent you one. I posted it myself."

"Where was it directed to?"

"Gloucester Street."

"Can you remember its contents?"

"I did not see them; but I know a portion of the letter was to the effect that Mrs. Barbour thought some pecuniary arrangement of the kind you desired might be made, and that I was willing, so far as practicable, to meet her and your views."

"You advised her to write, and offered to advance the sum required?"

"On the contrary, it was only because of her grief and entreaties I yielded even to the extent I have mentioned."

"You cannot tell me anything more which was in the letter?"

"No; but she wrote a second and sent it by hand, thinking, perhaps, the first had miscarried. After I passed you I thought I ought not to let the opportunity slip of knowing for certain whether either of the letters had reached you."

"No," was the reply, "they never did — they never did."

"May I tell her so?"

"Yes, if you like."

"Or will you write, and tell her yourself?"

"No; it is too late, Forbes. It is all too late."

"Your father is at Gerrard's Hall now," Percy volunteered.

"So I understand," was Lawrence's comment; but he never asked if his father were better; how his wife was; whether the children were well.

"Then you have no other message?"

"None," Lawrence replied, and the two parted — Percy to pursue his way to Goodman's Fields, and Lawrence to walk slowly onwards to the place he called his home.

"I will not ask her anything about it," he decided; "she would lie to me; and what is the good of a scene? There is no use in looking back; and, besides, if I had got the letter, my road was then chosen past recall."

That was it; the road he had traversed he could never retrace. And now, though God knew he was sick of himself and his life, and the fetters he had woven around his actions, yet he spoke but the simple truth to Percy Forbes, when he averred that the knowledge was come to him too late.

She had woven her meshes round him — he had voluntarily walked into her web, and there he must be content to abide. He could not leave Etta as he had left Olivine.

They were very different women to have to deal with. The wife was patient, and gentle, and sweet — the widow a very devil when her temper was roused, or her will opposed. Beyond all things Lawrence had learned to dread a scene. Besides, as he said, what was the use? What indeed!

Still time went by, and to Gerrard's Hall came neither message nor letter. Percy Forbes had told Olivine of his interview with her husband, and for days afterwards she watched for the arrival of the post with

sickening anxiety. "It will come to-day," she thought to herself each morning when she awoke; "it will come to-morrow" she said each night when she laid her head on the pillow; but the expected missive did not come for all that — neither in the day, nor on the morrow, nor in the forenoon, nor in the evening, came any tidings from the man she had loved so faithfully and so well.

It was summer again. Over the grass the lime trees trailed their long branches; down the glades the sheep browsed their fill; by the lake, on which the water-lilies floated, were parterres filled with all the thousand-and-one flowers that open in the bright June weather — that go to make the June air rich and heavy with all delicious odours; and yet there came no tidings to Olivine, who, dressed still in mourning, partly because her uncle's memory remained green in her heart, and greatly because she had no spirit to array herself in glad colours while her husband was absent, sat in the morning-room which commanded a view of the flower-garden and the smooth turf beyond — of the trees that further away skirted the domain, and of the road to London, along which her thoughts were ever wandering to the man who had deserted her.

Beside one of the windows stood Percy Forbes, with a worn weary look in his face, with a troubled expression in his eyes.

What he had come to be to her during that period of wearing suspense, I could scarcely tell; while what she had become to him, Percy himself was almost afraid to think.

If a couple of days passed without his entering her sitting-room and occupying his accustomed place, Olivine

grew restless and unhappy. Once he had stayed away for a whole week: he made a vow to himself he would not see her so constantly; he swore to his own soul he would keep out of the way of temptation and refrain from making her wretched; and the result was, that when they did meet, she told him with tears in her eyes how she thought everybody was deserting her, how if he forgot her in her trouble, she might as well, but for the children's sake, die at once.

After that Percy Forbes took his resolution, and now standing beside the window, he was considering how he should best say that which he wanted to say to her.

"I will write to him once again," she resumed after a pause, in continuation of their previous conversation — "once again, and send it to his office, where that woman cannot tamper with his letters. Do you not think I might do so?"

"There is nothing in the world to prevent your doing so," Percy answered.

"Is it not the best course for me to pursue?" she pleaded gently, for his tone was not encouraging.

"That depends entirely on what you mean to say in your letter," he replied.

"I mean to ask him to come back," she said, with a terrible sorrow in her tone. "What else can I say to him? He does not want money, he does not want me; yet still, for the sake of his children, perhaps —" she paused and looked in Percy's face, as though expecting him to help her out with the remainder of her sentence; but finding he remained silent, "What would you say if you were in my place?" she added, "what

would you do if you were a woman, and Lawrence your husband?"

"I would offer him a divorce," Percy answered, as he crossed the room and came close to the spot she occupied. "And that is what you ought to do, for your own sake, and his sake, and the sake of the children he has deserted."

"No—No—NO!" she cried, in a gradual *crescendo;* and she stretched out her hands, as though to push the idea from her.

"But I say yes," Percy persisted. "You ought to give him the chance of marrying Mrs. Gainswoode, and retrieving his position."

"Do you think he would marry her?" Olivine inquired, with a gasp of despair. Everything seemed going from her at the moment — life, and all it had once held for her. A wife, and yet a widow — a mother, and the father of her children the husband of another woman! she could not at once seize the whole horror of the idea Percy had put into her mind; but the horror overshadowed her, notwithstanding. "Do you mean to say you really believe I ought to leave him free — to marry *her* — to marry *her?*"

He stood a little behind her chair, and never answered her by a word.

"If I ought to do it, I will try," she went on, speaking in a faint low voice. "If you say it is right, I will try. I will think of it. I cannot judge, it is so hard. Do not tell me it is right — to put all hope from me for ever."

But still Percy made no reply.

"Why do you not speak," she said, turning and looking up in his face. "You told me I ought to give

him a divorce, because then he could marry Etta Gainswoode. Was not that it?"

"Yes," — it seemed to her scarcely credible that it was Percy Forbes who answered, his tone sounded so hard and constrained, — "because he could marry Etta Gainswoode; and it is only fair to give him the chance of doing so, and also because then —"

"Then what?" she asked. "Then —"

Then came the answer so long withheld, not in any form of words, but in a mad passionate kiss. In an instant the barrier of years was broken down, and the love of the man's heart found vent — the weir he had erected to keep the waters from flooding her happiness and making a wreck of the free intimacy, of the unreserved confidence, which had subsisted between them, gave way, and the torrent of his repressed affection burst from his lips at last.

Clasping her to his heart, he told her all: how he had loved her — how he had always loved her — how he had suffered — how he had endured — how, so long as there was even a chance of Lawrence returning to his allegiance, he had refrained — how, if she could but obtain her freedom, he would devote his life to her, the one only love of his heart. So the flood of the poor sinner's passion poured over her, while she unresistingly lay in his arms, and listened like one in a dream, never striving to stem the stream — never trying to hinder his kissing brow and cheek and lip till at last —

"Let me go," she said, and she covered her face with her hands, and fell a-weeping as though her heart would break.

"God forgive you, Percy Forbes!" she cried,

"when I never stood more in need of a friend in all my life."

When he came to think about the sentence in the after days, it struck Percy as rather hard — as being a trifle, perhaps, selfish.

The softest women probably are at times hard — the most amiable now and then oblivious to the feelings of others. Weakness expects, perhaps, strength to be made of steel; the sweet creatures occasionally like to take everything they can get, and think a smile and "thanks so much," sufficient payment.

Lubin adores Chloe, and asks the fair what he can do to pleasure her. Chloe forthwith sets Lubin to work, and when the task is completed, and she has got all she wants, shows the poor fool the door.

So the world goes; and women, unselfish towards the men they love, are selfish towards every other man in creation.

They believe in friendship! Heaven help them; and till they find out their mistake will persist in thinking swains delight in overcoming all sorts of obstacles for the sale of Phyllises they respect! — save the mark!

"Then when they find Lubin has loved them all along, what a hubbub there is — what an outcry and dismay!

"There is the door, sir," cries the offended fair; "there is the door; pray shut it after you, and never let me see your face more."

The way women go on believing in friendship till they find friendship ordinarily means love (in which case they become indignant) is perhaps the most wonderful thing, among many wonders, about them; and this

wonder, and these contradictions, Percy Forbes thought about subsequently at his leisure in Goodman's Fields, though there seemed nothing either strange or miraculous to him in Olivine's conduct at the time when the scene I am trying to describe was enacting.

Rather, on the contrary, penitence came more natural to him then, than expostulation; to beg pardon seemed more proper than to explain to Olivine the unreasonableness of her expectations.

"Forgive me!" he said, in answer to her cry of bitterness; and he fell on his knees and kissed the hem of her garment.

"Forgive me, I have sinned; but oh! Olivine, be merciful. Tell me what I can do for you now — how I can serve you."

"You can go," she said, and she drew her dress from his touch, while she pointed to the door.

"I obey," Percy answered, and he rose from the ground, and walked across the room, and grasped the handle of the door to open it."

"You have been very good to me —" this sentence came to him through the silence of that silent house. "You have been very good to me; but you have done wrong now."

"I go to expiate that wrong in banishment," he answered.

"Don't part from me in anger," she said; "we have been friends — we are friends, are we not?"

"For ever," he replied — "though perhaps we may never meet again;" and he would have opened the door and walked forth, but that of her own free will she came towards him, and put her little hand in his,

and bade him "good-by," with the tears streaming down her cheeks the while.

Then he stooped to kiss the hand she had given him, sorrowfully, and saying — "I shall never come here more without your permission," left the room, passed through the hall, and walked out of the hall door, leaving Olivine alone!

CHAPTER XVIII.

Beaten.

Supposing (which is one of the unlikeliest suppositions possible) an angel were to descend from Heaven, and take a walk down Cheapside on a muddy day, there can be little doubt but that the angelic pedestrian would find its equanimity discomposed when at nightfall it came to enquire into the condition of its wings.

In the better land, neither taint nor soil could ever touch its snowy plumage; and, as it is with the angel's wings, so it is with many a woman's purity.

She cannot endure that aught so gross as the dust of earth should sully the whiteness of her garments; she cannot bear that a breath should touch her; that aught of evil should brush garments with her; unconsciously almost she shrinks from contact with mortality, and at the first word of sin she recoils with horror. In the one case, it would be the angel accustomed to a land where dust, mud, water-carts, and Pickford's vans are not; in the other, it is simply that the woman does not know what the world is, nor of what materials the men and the women who make up the world are composed.

To some people it is a great shock to find, not merely that their neighbours are only mortal, but also that they themselves are capable of receiving splashes as they travel along the common highway of existence; and to no person did the knowledge that she was but human, come with a greater shock than to Olivine Barbour.

About life she had never thought much; about the temptations to which in the course of life men and women are necessarily exposed, she had thought still less; but when, in the silence of her own chamber, she recalled the passion of love which Percy Forbes had expressed for her, when she remembered all his unselfish devotion, all his hopeless affection through the years, she shivered, and her heart grew still.

Oh, Lord! how the man had loved her! and was it possible that all unknown to herself she had loved him in return?

Never a bitterer hour can come, I think, to a woman than the one which strikes when she discovers that in the very citadel of her purity — in the very innermost sanctuary of her holy temple, there has been lurking an enemy — there has been secreted a foe.

From all advancing armies, from all besieging hosts, the city which stands on a hill, which is surrounded by moat and wall, and fortified in anticipation of danger, may be held secure. But not so when there is a traitor at the gates, when there is a false friend to betray the weak point, to open the postern door, and let in one at a time the devil and his legions.

For what had passed between herself and Percy Forbes, Olivine would have cared comparatively little save for this — she doubted herself, doubted whether

she were really angry as she ought to be — whether she were not more sorry for the breach than dismayed at its cause — whether she could get through the days now her old friend was banished from the house — whether she were not, in a word, more grieved than indignant, more surprised than dismayed.

"He must never come here again," she decided, as virtue has many a time decided such a question before, — "never." And then she fell to weeping over the man's desolate life — over his unrequited attachment in a manner which would have rejoiced Percy's heart had he only been permitted to see it.

All through that night, all through the next day, and through another night again, Olivine pondered on the words Percy had spoken — on the idea he had presented for her consideration.

"You ought to give him a divorce."

Perhaps so — perhaps it would be better that he should marry the woman than continue to live with her in sin — but as for the other side of the question, she, Olivine, knew she could never even think of loving another man — never be treacherous and faithless to Lawrence, let him have been ever so false — false, and base, and weak; while, as for choosing a second husband, Olivine scouted the suggestion. Choose another after having been married to Lawrence — never!

Having decided all which matters to her own satisfaction, Mrs. Barbour came to the conclusion that the best course for her to pursue would be to seek an interview with her husband, whom she had never beheld since the day when she refused him assistance.

This much she did not fear to undertake on her own responsibility; she felt no dread of conceiving and

carrying out such a project, even without any adviser to egg her on.

If the thing were right to be done, she would do it; and in her heart, perhaps, not sorry for so good a pretext of seeking out the prodigal and looking in his face once more, Olivine started one afternoon for London, and took cab from the Fenchurch Street Terminus to Gloucester Street.

"Set me down at the corner of Portman Square," she said to the driver. At the end of the street accordingly he pulled up; and after many many months, Olivine walked slowly on towards the house which had once been her home — her home and his — theirs.

She could not go on for a minute or two; she turned and walked back all round the square, before she altogether recovered from the sick faintness which came over her. But as she entered Gloucester Street again she saw that which gave her strength and courage to proceed, Lawrence's brougham drive up to the door, and he and Mrs. Gainswoode alight therefrom.

They entered the house and passed up stairs, but the hall door remained open while the coachman and butler exchanged confidences.

"Mr. Barbour?" Olivine said interrogatively, breaking across their conversation.

"I will see, ma'am, if he is at home," hesitated the butler, who had never beheld Olivine before.

"I have seen him go in," she replied, slipping at the same time that key which she had heard possessed the power of opening any door into the man's hand. "I — I know Mr. Barbour very well indeed; you need not announce me; I can find my way to the drawing-room quite well alone."

But on this point her auditor proved inflexible. "Your name, ma'am, if you please?" he said, pausing on the first landing, and addressing her in a tone which admitted of no refusal.

"Mrs. Barbour," Olivine replied, raising her head with a little defiant gesture, and colouring up to her temples while she spoke.

"If you believe me," observed the butler, when describing the scene subsequently for the edification of the servants' hall, "If you believe me, you might a knocked me down with a feather."

"I wonder you could go through with it, Mr. Mosley," said the lady's maid, prettily sympathising.

"Well, you know, I had gone too far to recede," remarked Mr. Mosley. "So I flung open the drawing-room door, and threw the name, 'Mrs. Barbour,' into it just like a shell a-bursting."

"Oh, lor!" ejaculated the maid, "and what happened then?"

"What happened then, Miss White, I regret as it aint in my power to inform you, for I had to shut the door again, and leave them to their sorrow."

Whereupon the assembled ladies expressed their regret at so interesting a narrative being so brief, and solaced themselves, in the absence of actual information, by imagining all sorts of violence and denunciation.

"I am sure I wonder she did not clawer her eyes out," suggested the upper housemaid, who had been crossed in love, and was afflicted with a violent temper.

"She didn't look one of the sort for that," remarked Mr. Mosley.

"Poor thing, I do feel for her," declared the cook.

"I wonder what she said to him;" and then all the company generally, wondered too.

What Olivine said, however, was simply this: "Mrs. Gainswoode, will you allow me to speak with my husband alone for a few minutes?"

"Certainly, my dear," acquiesced Mrs. Gainswoode, and she went out by one door, and, entering the back drawing-room by another, listened through the heavy curtains to all Olivine had come to say.

"If you are here to reproach me —" were the first words Mrs. Gainswoode heard spoken; to which the wife replied:

"I am not going to reproach you; if you — if you are happy, I will try to be content. I have come to strive to make you happier. I am told I ought to give you the chance of marrying the — the — woman you love better than me. If you tell me you would like a divorce, I will strive to get one — I will."

She stood in the middle of the room a couple of yards away from him and uttered the foregoing sentence like a child repeating a lesson.

"Who put that into your mind, Olivine?" asked her husband.

"Never mind who put it there — it is there," she replied. "I would do anything to make you happy — anything to keep you from sin — even that — for I have loved you, Lawrence — though you may not think it — I have loved you better than my life."

"Then you do not love me now, Olivine?" he said.

"What can it matter whether I do or not?" was her answer. "You never loved me."

"Did I not?" he interrupted.

"You never loved me," she went on unheeding, "you loved Etta Alwyn, you loved Mrs. Gainswoode. Marry her now if you like. I will free you from me, if I can; only tell me what you wish, and I will do it."

"How are the children, Olivine?" he asked abruptly.

"They are quite well," she answered quietly enough, but her voice was full of tears.

"They have forgotten me, I suppose?"

"Come home and try whether they have?" she said.

"Then it is not for your own sake you want this divorce?" he suggested.

"Mine, Lawrence?" she repeated, "mine?"

"You would marry again, Olivine," he remarked, but she only shook her head sorrowfully, and answered, "No, I never could."

"If you wish to free yourself from me," he said, after a pause, "do so; I have deserved it."

"But do you want to be free?" she enquired.

"No, Olivine, I do not," he answered; "though I shall never come back — though I have sinned too deeply ever to return, I do not wish it; but you ought to have liberty; it is for you to decide."

"No," she answered, "it is not — it is not;" and there ensued a silence which was passed in bitter thought by both.

Then the wife, moving a step or two nearer the door, said, "Perhaps you will write and let me know?"

"Know! Know about what?" he enquired.

"About what you wish me to do;" and she stood

irresolute for a moment. "Are you quite well?" was her next question.

"Better than I deserve to be," he replied; and there ensued another pause.

"I must go now," she said, at length, and she came quite close up to him and touched his hand. "Good by, Lawrence. You know I wrote to you about that money, do you not? You know I was sorry for what I said. Good by!"

"Good by!" He stooped forward, and would have kissed her, but she drew back.

"Has it come to that?" he exclaimed. "Has it come to that?" and he dropped her hand and leaned his head forward on the chimneypiece, beside which he was standing.

Steadily and resolutely enough Olivine walked to the door, but there she paused and looked back. Let him be what he would to Etta, she could not leave him thus.

"Lawrence!" the dear hand was on his shoulder, the sweet eyes pleading for a glance. "Lawrence!" and she pushed his fingers from before his face, and kissed her husband as though she were parting from him for ever. After that, and as if distrusting her own resolution, she left the room and the house.

"He will write to me now," she thought; but the days passed by and still no letter came to Grays. What a miserable time that proved to Olivine, with Percy in banishment, and without a soul to whom she could confide her sorrows and perplexities!

"He may come back," she thought; but Lawrence did not come back; and so two months fled by, bringing with them no tidings of her husband, ex-

cept at length a vague rumour that he and Etta had quarrelled, and that he was residing in Gloucester Street alone.

Soon after, Percy Forbes ascertained for certain he and Etta were separated. From Mr. Perkins he learned Lawrence had repeated Olivine's offer to Mrs. Gainswoode, who treated it with contemptuous scorn. "Marry, indeed!" she echoed, "when every shilling I have in the world goes from me if I take to myself a second husband. Marry! — no, let Olivine have a chance of marrying Percy Forbes, if you like; but do not talk about matrimony and nonsense to me!"

"I have enough for both," he replied.

"That is fortunate for you, but I confess I like something more substantial to depend on than shares in all sorts of companies. It is very profitable while the companies are good for anything, doubtless, but I have seen so much of business ups and downs, that, now I am independent of trade, I should like to keep so, thank you. The plain English of Olivine's offer is that she wants to marry Percy Forbes, and I can only say, considering how kind and attentive you have been to her, and how fond he was of her, and the state of Arcadian innocence in which you all dwelt together, I wonder she did not give you grounds for a divorce long ago."

Which speech merely proved the first of a series of speeches that led at length to serious quarrels, and subsequently to a final breach.

In a fit of temper Etta left Gloucester Street, and to Gloucester Street Lawrence swore she should never return. Intelligence of this rupture Percy communicated by letter to Mrs. Barbour.

"He is certain to come back now," she decided, and she tossed the baby, as her youngest child was still called, up in the air, and bade the little creature clap her hands and say, "Papa 'ill soon be home; papa 'ill soon be home," as well as its lisping tongue was able.

"Has papa been very far away, mamma?" asked Maude, a thoughtful, old-fashioned child, who wonderfully resembled the earlier Olivine of this story.

"Yes, my pet — he has been very far away — very, very far indeed," answered the poor mother; and she looked with a strained wistful glance over the landscape, thinking the while of that very far journey into the domains of sin which Lawrence had taken.

"Will he come to-day, mamma?"

"To-morrow, love — I hope, to-morrow;" but the morrows were metamorphosed into to-days and yesterdays, and still Lawrence did not return to Gerrard's Hall.

All in vain Olivine wrote to him. No reply was vouchsafed; and the wife, whose heart was almost broken, grew pale and thin and worn with watching for the husband who never came, with listening for the sound of feet that had, as she thought, forgotten the very road to her home.

In her despair, she at length appealed to Lawrence's father. "Will you go and make inquiry about him?" she asked; and, after some demur, Mr. Barbour, senior, agreed to seek out his son, providing Mr. Perkins bore him company.

"You need not go a step further unless you choose to do so," said that gentleman, when Mr. Barbour laid the state of the case out for his consideration in Distaff

Yard. "Lawrence is very ill indeed, and his business has all gone to the devil together."

"What do you mean — has he had any losses?"

"He has lost everything, sir; we have lost everything, and I am a beggar."

At which point Mr. Perkins fairly broke down and cried like a woman.

"It is hard to begin life again at my age," he remarked, while Mr. Barbour, with a vague desire to be sympathetic, and yet philosophical, stood patting him on the back, observing at the same time "I had always said no good could come of business; I would have nothing to do with it for the future, Mr. Perkins. If you take my advice you will buy a nice little piece of land and occupy yourself in farming. There is money to be made by farming;" went on the childish old man, "though I never made anything by it myself, still I am told some people do, and it is so much nicer in every way than trade," he continued, maundering on till Mr. Perkins' entreaties that he would not pour water on a drowned rat, brought him to the consideration at once of his kinsman's misfortunes and his son's reverses.

"I suppose Lawrence feels it very much," he suggested.

"Feels it — I should think so — it will kill him: that is about the sum total of the matter," returned Mr. Perkins, savagely, and then he rose, — observing if Mr. Barbour wanted to go to Gloucester Street, he was ready to accompany him.

"I — I — think I had better return to Grays and acquaint his wife," hesitated Mr. Barbour.

For a moment Mr. Perkins looked at the man who

made this speech in utter amazement, then he said, "Of course you can do as you like," — and turning on his heel left Mr. Barbour to make his way out of the yard as best he might.

CHAPTER XIX.

After the Race.

EVERYTHING Mr. Perkins stated was correct. There is many a horse that has been hopelessly beaten even within sight of the winning post; many a steeplechase has been lost at the last leap; many a gallant ship has foundered within sight of land; and many a man has been beggared when fortune's richest gifts were almost within his grasp.

The blow had fallen suddenly at last, but to Lawrence it was not quite unexpected. With striving after too much he had finally got his business into such a state that failure in one venture meant failure in all. The proximate cause of his ruin was a brace of dishonoured bills that had been accepted by men whom he considered "good as the Bank of England," that he had paid away, and that he found himself unable to take up.

In this difficulty he applied to a friend for assistance, and the friend promised to try, and not merely promised, but really did try to such good purpose that before a week he appeared in Lawrence's office with the desired amount in his pocket-book.

"Thank you all the same, Wrangham," Lawrence remarked, "but it is too late now. The British and Continental Provision Company is gone to-day; and

the Conqueror Fire and Life Office must close to-morrow. The bills were trouble enough, as I thought, but they are as nothing to these Companies — nothing. The great things of to-day will be the trifles of to-morrow. That is a comfort to remember, at any rate. Take back your money, Wrangham, it is very kind of you, but I do not need it now."

"Do you mean to say, Barbour, you are going to throw up the cards in that way — you of all men?" asked the other in amazement.

"Ah! my boy," was the reply, "when the trumps are all gone what is the use of continuing the game?"

"And your works in Distaff Yard?"

"For God's sake don't speak to me about them," Lawrence exclaimed. "If anything turns out wrong there I shall go mad; as it is, my head feels on fire."

"If you do not take care of yourself you will be laid up," remarked Mr. Wrangham, and his words proved prophetic.

Before the week was over, Lawrence could not leave his bed, and when the final crash came he was happily oblivious of it. In his delirium he raved about the Lallard Woods and the game he had snared there. He sung snatches of songs and would whistle for his old dog, and swear he was going out with gun and pouch for a long day's shooting. He talked of Mallingford, and the peaches growing on the South Wall; he went out fishing in his wandering fancy, and caught trout and trench, and pointed to his imaginary prey in triumph.

The long years of his struggling youth and unhappy manhood faded out of his recollection as breath fades away from the surface of a mirror, and the only

things which remained fresh and unchanged as ever were the bright idle sunshiny days, spent in boyish pursuits, filled with folly and joy, when he and his brother tramped along the lonely lanes, and lit their gipsy fires, and cooked their stolen food, as careless concerning the past, as they were indifferent about the future.

Never a word of wife or child, of wealth, of mistress! — all the time of his sojourn in London seemed wiped out from his memory. He was a boy again, among the green fields far away in the lonely country — a boy, with the sin and the sorrow and the struggle of his later life forgotten as though they had never been.

When he first became delirious, his servants, not knowing what better course to adopt, sent over intelligence of his state to Hereford Street.

Etta and her father being out of town, the two butlers held a consultation as to the next thing to be done, and Mr. Alwyn's head man, who had known Percy Forbes for years, at last decided on going due east himself in search of that gentleman.

"He'll tell us what to do. I am sure I can't see my way among them," and concluding that his difficulty lay between Mrs. Gainswoode and Mrs. Barbour, the Gloucester Street official thought the plan proposed the wisest plan that could be followed.

"Ill with fever," repeated Percy Forbes to himself, "and a beggar; that was not quite the end you anticipated when you started in your Race for Wealth," and he stood looking at the sick man with a terrible pity and an awful regret, while he raved about the scenes of his childhood and revisited his boyish haunts in the dreams of delirium, in the fitful fancies of fever.

"May I remain, Mrs. Barbour?" he said, humbly; when at length Olivine, informed of her husband's danger, hurried up to town, and thankfully she bade him stay, for who in all the world had ever been so true and good a friend to them both as he.

"And when he recovers a little we will get him out of town, please God," Olivine remarked, while the sick man still talked so glibly, and ceaselessly concerning the covers where the pheasants lay, and the stubble that concealed the partridges.

Knowing the whole of the man's life — his labours, his disappointments, his struggles, his sins, his temptations; mindful of the great unstable edifice he had reared for himself, and cognisant of how that edifice had been levelled suddenly to the ground, there was something unutterably mournful to the listeners in hearing his ravings about the simple pleasures, the trivial distresses of his earlier life.

"It is very terrible," Olivine said, weeping.

"It is very merciful," Percy answered.

They did not speak much to one another in those days — they did not talk concerning the ruin that had come on all. Only once Olivine enquired "whether anything could be done for Mr. Perkins?" and Percy asked what she desired should be done.

"I wish he could keep on the Distaff Yard Works," she said.

"It shall be seen to," he answered, and Olivine rested content.

What, indeed, was there in those days that he did not see to, for her, and for him. It seemed as though he fancied he could not make reparation sufficient for having put even the idea of abandoning her husband

into Olivine's mind. "If she had done so, and that then this had happened," he thought, not once only during Lawrence's illness, but a score of times, "I should never have forgiven myself; but then who could possibly have anticipated such an ending? — Etta gone — he a beggar, Olivine nursing him, and I here."

A couple of months had indeed brought about great and unexpected changes. When the June roses were in bloom, Lawrence was at the very summit of worldly success. Now, almost before the leaves on the limes had begun to change colour, he lay hovering between life and death, a ruined man.

The race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong; neither, as a rule, when the events of life's day come to be reviewed, can any man honestly say it was for the mere sake of amassing money, he planned amid the purple tints of morning to gain him riches — to gather gold.

Wealth; what is wealth? Is it hoards of treasure, or barns filled to overflowing with corn and the glad earth's increase? — is it great blocks of houses and stores crammed from cellar to roof with goodly merchandise? — is it land stretching away far as the eye can see, or scrip, or stock, or ground-rent? — rather is it not the sweet home ties, a tranquil mind, a quiet conscience, the ability to look back over the past without remorse, to face that hour which was fast coming to Lawrence Barbour, without fear?

For he could not live. When once the fever left him, that fact became patent to every one save Olivine. His old injuries told against him now. He might linger for a time, the doctors said, but they could give no hope of his strength ever returning to him.

But all this his wife could not, or would not, believe. She had faith in her own ability to ward off death from him. She imagined if he were once out of London the quiet and the peace of her country home must restore him to health.

"I cannot live without you, darling," she whispered, when he told her it was useless. "Will you let me try to have you taken there?"

"As you will, love," he answered, closing his eyes wearily while he spoke.

They moved him to Gerrard's Hall, and he bore the short journey better than his medical attendants had predicted would be the case.

"You see they were mistaken in thinking you so weak," Olivine said, with thankful tears dimming her eyes. "You will get better here — we can carry you out on to the lawn, and the pure air will give you strength, and you will live for the children's sake and mine."

"I will try my best, Olivine," he answered, with a sad, sick smile; "only if I should fail, let me tell you where I should like to be laid. In that churchyard down by the Thames we walked to one Sunday, the first Sunday after you promised to marry me."

"I cannot bear it, Lawrence," she said, covering her face with her hands.

"That was a bad day's work for you, my child," he went on stroking her hair lovingly.

"Oh! no — no," she interrupted.

"But yes—" he answered; "if I could live my life over again I should strive to make you happier. I think I have been mad. Oh, Lord! it is hard for a man to recover his senses only that he may see what he has lost."

"But you will live, Lawrence," she pleaded, with the tears streaming down her cheeks.

"I will if I can," he replied; but he turned his tired eyes towards the window as he spoke, and, looking a-down the long grassy avenue of lime trees, muttered to himself "We all do fade as a leaf!"

In those days he gave way to Olivine's lightest wish; if she fancied it would do him good to be carried into the garden, or placed on a sofa where the sunbeams fell warm on the long glade in front of the house, he acceded to her desire. Whatever food and medicine she brought him he tried to take.

"It cannot cure me," he remarked to Percy Forbes; "but it pleases her, poor child."

He had long talks in those days with his old partner, and more than once he referred to the rivalry which once existed between them, to the race in which they had mutually entered.

"Do you remember my betting my life against a thousand pounds?" he asked one day. "It was a foolish thing to do; but I am about to pay my debt honestly. How long it seems since those words were spoken. Where shall I be, Forbes, when those trees are green again?" he proceeded, as a sudden gust of wind brought a shower of leaves down on the smooth sward. "You won't answer me; well, I must answer myself. I shall have entered on that Eternal To-morrow — where all the great things of To-day will seem the merest trifles."

This idea seemed to have taken utter possession of him. "I read it somewhere; or I heard it somewhere; or I dreamt it; or it came back to me from the past. I cannot tell how it chanced to be impressed on my

memory; but for a considerable time before the crash, that sentence, 'The great things of To-day — are the trifles of to-morrow,' always seemed ringing in my ears; and, strange as you may think it, the truth contained in those words enabled me to bear troubles and anxieties without number. I wonder, Forbes, what you will be doing when the leaves are falling next year!"

"God knows!" Percy answered.

"Mr. Sondes did right about the money, you see," Lawrence continued; "if he had left it in my power, Olivine and the children would have been paupers."

"If he had left it in your power, perhaps you might have shaped your course differently," Percy remarked.

"Perhaps so; but it is better as it is," was the reply; "far better."

Olivine could not be induced to think so, however. She would have given house and home and fortune to keep him with her a little longer; but at last it became evident even to her that his day was drawing nigh to its close, his sun about to sink in darkness. — As an oak whose leaf fadeth, he was passing away; like as the grass withereth and the flower falleth, he, the once strong, self-reliant, resolute man, who had set out in life to make a happy destiny for himself, was sinking long before he reached middle age into the grave, where there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom.

He had laboured, he had striven — he had made his way — he had wrought out to a great extent his fortune; but the word of Him who cannot lie hath declared —

"Neither is bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill;" — and so, after all his endeavours, spite of all his struggles, he departed with the leaves, poor as the day when he first entered London.

And yet not so. He was rich in love. He had wife and children beside him to the last.

The wealth he once coveted, the Lord in mercy took away; the wealth he once despised, the Lord in mercy gave him in his hour of need.

While the blinds were drawn close — while the dead man lay waiting for burial — while the servants went about the house with noiseless tread, and the children's voices were hushed, Olivine, passing one afternoon by the drawing-room door, heard two people engaged in somewhat vehement conversation.

"I shall not tell her, Mrs. Gainswoode," Percy Forbes seemed answering; "and I shall not permit her to be told. Have you not caused misery enough, that you should come here at such a time, with such a request?"

"You do not know how I loved him," was all she said in reply.

"And that love was none so praiseworthy you should boast of it in this house," he retorted bitterly.

"I am not boasting," she replied; "I only tell you I loved him, and that I would look on his face once more. If Olivine knew how miserable I am, she would not refuse my request."

"I would not," Olivine declared. She stood in the doorway, clad in her widow's weeds — her eyes red and swollen with weeping — her figure wasted — her face worn. "I would not," she repeated; "if it will be any comfort to you hereafter, to have looked on his face now, come with me; you shall see him if you will."

She led the way up the broad staircase, and entered the room where all that was mortal of Lawrence Barbour lay.

Without any apparent passion of grief, Mrs. Gainswoode touched the dead — timidly, and as though she feared Olivine's displeasure. Finding, however, that there was no effort made to prevent her doing as she liked, Etta stooped and kissed his lips. Then she signed that she was ready, and turned to leave the room.

"Do you forgive me?" she whispered, on the threshold.

"I do," Olivine answered.

"Will you let me kiss you?" and receiving no repulse, she wound her arm round Olivine's neck and pressed her lips to hers, just as she had done in the garden at Reach House so many a year before.

"You will never see me again," she said, and, drawing her veil over her face, she passed down the staircase, and out of the house.

CONCLUSION.

THERE are but a few more threads to gather up, and the web is finished — my story told.

In accordance with Olivine's wishes, Percy Forbes made such arrangements as enabled Mr. Perkins not merely to continue the Distaff Yard business, but to carry it on so successfully that doubtless, as his younger children grow up like the olive-trees, he will be able to portion the daughters liberally, and start his sons in good businesses on their own account.

Mrs. Perkins still resides on the premises, and still has a *penchant* for making the lives of maids-of-all-work a weariness unto them, and of spending much time in her kitchen and in superintending the preparation of various culinary mysteries, occupations, which she enlivens by frequent visits to Old Ford, where she and Ada talk much about former times, and make abundant allusion to Lawrence Barbour and Olivine Sondes.

As for Mrs. Gainswoode, any bright sunshiny day, if you like to walk on the sea-side of the Marine Parade at Brighton between the hours of twelve and two o'clock, you may see a paralyzed old man wheeled along the path, while beside him walks a haggard, discontented-looking woman, who, once beautiful, is beautiful no longer. Her son is at school, and Mallingford End is let during his minority. She detests London, and she hates the very mention of society; but as she looks out over the sea, her thoughts are in the past, they never really live in the present.

And Olivine — there came a day, — when her

grief growing less passionate, her regret a softer memory — Percy Forbes pleaded his suit once more.

In the same room where he had held her to his heart, he repeated the story of his faithful love, of his unalterable attachment.

He talked to her, and still she made no answer. He prayed her to speak, and still there came no word, till at length he said he would go, and return only if she gave him leave to return never to leave her in life again.

Then she stretched out her hands towards him, and said, "Percy, come back, don't go away at all," and she laid her head on his breast, and wept for very happiness that at last she had found a haven of rest.

They do not live at Gerrard's Hall now, but during most part of the year at Carris Copse, which Percy bought soon after his marriage and took possession of.

He was anxious to get Olivine away from Grays, — to remove her from the house and the scenes where she had suffered so much, — and perhaps the only cloud that ever now darkens for a time the brightness of his sky, is when he imagines he can read in his wife's face that her thoughts have travelled back to the lonely graveyard by the river, where Lawrence Barbour sleeps quietly, unconscious of the din of that great city not a score miles from his solitary resting-place, where other men traverse the streets he once paced; where others are still day by day, slaving, toiling, hurrying, striving, suffering in the Race for Wealth.

THE END.

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